

Heavenstruck

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Heavenstruck

by [dontrollthedice](#)

Summary

When a man falls out of the sky and lands in front of him, Dream learns three things:

- 1) Normalcy is relative,
- 2) Guardian angels exist and he has one named George,
- 3) Starting a conversation by asking if the other fell from heaven isn't effective if the other person actually did, in fact, fall from heaven.

Earthbound

Normalcy was relative.

That was probably why cars whizzing just a hair away from Dream didn't faze him anymore, and neither did the ungodly amount of kitchen fires he'd caused. He'd survived much worse, after all. No matter how dire a situation seemed, there was always something that protected him from certain death.

The vending machine fell over.

A truck sped through a stop sign.

A cyclist just managed to swerve before hitting him.

All was normal.

The shadow falling from the sky on the ruined path to his apartment was not.

Dream squinted at the shadow. Was... Was that hail? It never snowed in Florida, let alone *hailed*. It couldn't be.

Actually, it seemed more like a person, now that it was closer to him. But there was no way he'd be unlucky enough to witness this, right?

Then the figure—who was decidedly human after all—crashed into the ground in front of Dream, the dirt muffling what he was sure were various colorful words.

Well, at least now Dream knew how fate felt about him.

A person just fell from the sky... Maybe he should investigate that.

Dream stepped closer and craned his head down.

Now that he had time to look, the figure was a man with giant, white wings sprouting out of his back. The loose, white outfit he wore was tattered and littered with stains. A radiant, almost godly aura surrounded him. But where were his shoes? Were they somewhere in the forest?

His observations stopped when the man groaned and pushed himself up from the ground, rubbing his head. The outline of his body was imprinted into the dirt.

Then the man locked eyes with him.

No, Dream. Bad, bad idea. Don't do it. Just shut up and walk away.

"Hey," Dream said, "did you just fall from heaven?"

Silence.

A few giggles escaped from Dream's mouth.

God damn it.

Dream erupted into hysterical laughter, falling to his knees and holding his stomach. When he

thought the laughter was over, he remembered the joke again and laughed even harder than before. Each look at the man's unamused expression triggered another almost inaudible wheeze from him.

"No, I crawled my way up from hell," the man spat with crossed arms.

Dream was still laughing, but he held his palms up. "Okay, okay, sorry. I just—I need a moment."

The man sighed as Dream continued his hysterical laughter but spoke again when his laughter began to die down. "Has anyone ever told you that you sound like a tea kettle?"

"A lot of people, actually," Dream said with a grin. He looked back up to meet the other man's gaze, and then it hit him.

A man with wings just fell out of the sky and crashed in front of him, and his first instinct was to make a shitty joke. It was storming; he was cold and wet and just wanted to get back home. But maybe he should be taking this situation a bit more seriously.

"What's with your wings?" Dream asked. "We don't have a lot of cosplay conventions down here."

Right. *That* was the first question he chose to ask.

The man scoffed. "You'd think someone would care more when they meet their guardian angel, but I guess not." His wings flapped, his right smacking into a tree and shaking a few leaves off the branch. It retracted back to his side in an instant. "And my wings are real. I'm not gonna let you touch them, of course, but you'll just have to believe me for now."

Okay. Wait.

"Guardian angel?"

"Yes, your guardian angel. Why're you so surprised by that?"

What the hell?

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. "Oh, I don't know, because I didn't even know you existed? And I don't mean to offend you or anything, but I'm still not entirely sure you're not fucking with me."

"You literally saw me fall out of the sky."

"Good point, but..." He frowned. "Actually, are you hurt? That looked like a long fall."

The man stared at him in disbelief. Were guardian angels supposed to be this indignant? "You only just now ask me that? And no, the only thing hurt from that fall was my pride. I don't follow the same rules of mortality as humans."

Dream looked him up and down.

Seeing as how the man was well enough to stand up on his own and didn't have any discomfort visible on his face, he probably wasn't lying about not being hurt. Dream knew for a fact there weren't any buildings that even went near where the man fell from. The tallest tree was visible from where he was standing, too. And he wasn't a certified expert on angel wings, but the man's fluid control over them certainly hinted that they weren't some complex mechanical system...

Oh, shit. Was this actually his guardian angel?

"Say my name," Dream said.

The man's nose wrinkled. "Why should I?"

"If you're really my guardian angel, then you should know my name by now. You've been with me my whole life, right?"

"No, that was the bastard that got promoted. I drew the short end of the stick and had to fill his position a month ago. Anyway..." A sheet of paper materialized in front of the man. "You're Clay."

Dream's nose wrinkled. "Ugh, if you were actually my guardian angel, then you'd know I prefer Dream."

The man frowned and pursed his lips. Before he could say anything, lightning clapped much too near for Dream's liking.

Dream turned towards the noise.

Flames licked the treetops, spiraling to the ground within a single blink. There was no way that was good, not with the way the fire ate away at the particularly large branches of the tree. The rain had no effect on how intensely it blazed.

"Look out!"

A fireball rained from the sky right above Dream. That was all he could see before the man rushed forward and flapped a wing. Then the fireball streaked towards the other side of the path.

Did... Did he save him?

"God, you are literally the worst person at staying alive," the man grumbled. "There's a flaming branch coming towards you, and that's your first instinct? Just sit there and watch it burn? Fucking idiot."

The man's insults flew past Dream's head. Dream's eyes flittered from the man to the direction the branch was pushed away, then back to the man.

"Holy shit, you're actually my guardian angel," Dream breathed. Then when the man finally smiled, he burst out laughing. "Dude, I am so sorry! You're the poor guy that got assigned to me? You? What kind of sin did you commit for you to get stuck with me? Oh my *god*, this is insane."

The smile vanished as quickly as it came, replaced with a scowl. "Whatever. Get to your apartment so less things can potentially kill you."

A smile was still present on Dream's face, but the laughter stopped. "Huh? How're you gonna explain the wings on your back, genius?"

"I'm only visible to you right now. When I turn visible again, my wings will be hidden. So, right now, you look like a maniac."

"Good to know. And who said you were allowed in my apartment?"

The man scoffed and rolled his eyes. "Even if you didn't let me in, I could still force my way in. I can go wherever you go, after all. And it's your fault I'm down here in the first place, so it would be in your best conscious to give me somewhere to stay."

Dream's eyebrows furrowed. He pointed a thumb at himself. "My fault?"

"Yes, it's your fault!" the man shouted. "Other people can stay alive for more than two days, so their guardian angels watch them from heaven. But you? God, you can't stay alive for more than five minutes. My boss literally sent me down here so I could keep better watch over you."

"You have a boss?"

"That's what you got out of my entire rant?"

Dream shrugged and brushed bits of ash off his shoulder. Maybe they should get going, even if he wasn't keen on having a snarky angel as his roommate for an undetermined amount of time.

"Whatever, dude. I guess you can stay on my couch."

The man's wing flapped away another flaming tree branch. "Can we please leave now?"

"Can I have your name first?"

"It's George. Now move!"

The second George pushed Dream forward, a log collapsed on the path right where Dream was standing.

Well, that was all the prodding Dream needed.

Dream ran down the broken path to his apartment, George following close behind him.

"Wow, you call that cooking? My cat ate better food when I was still alive."

"Aren't you supposed to be my protector or something?"

"Protector from physical attacks, not verbal ones."

It wasn't even half an hour into this arrangement and Dream already hated it. Was he allowed to fire his guardian angel? Was that a thing? He didn't need him anyway!

He reconsidered that thought when George blocked his hand from touching the stove.

Consideration of that came back when George rolled his eyes.

"Do you have to be here?" Dream said as he poured spaghetti onto two plates.

George, to his credit, took the plates and set them on the table. "I don't want to be here either, but rules are rules." He took the forks Dream handed him and set them down. "If you have guests coming over, they won't notice anything. Just try not to interact with me and everything will go smoothly."

"Unless you try to embarrass me."

"I'm not risking getting demoted for you."

"Fair enough." Dream looked down at George's tattered clothing. "Um, do you wanna get dressed in something less dirty? I'm pretty sure any of my clothes will fit you."

George shrugged. "They get reset once they've taken enough damage. This is pretty close to the limit."

Dream took a spoon and flicked marinara sauce at him.

"Are you kidding me?" George said when the sauce landed on him. In a split second too quick for Dream to comprehend, his outfit was repaired. "That actually worked?"

"You didn't know?"

"It's not every day that you get marinara sauce flung at you."

"Good point." Dream sat down at the table, then turned to George expectantly.

George was leaned against the counter, staring down at his fingernails with a blank expression on his face. His leg bounced up and down, as if he was waiting for something.

Dream raised an eyebrow. "George? You're not gonna eat?"

George jumped upon hearing his name. His eyes locked onto Dream completely. "Oh, this was for me? I thought you were waiting for a friend."

"I would've told you if someone was coming."

"Right. Um..." George cleared his throat. "I appreciate the sentiment, but angels don't need to eat. They can, of course, but it's not necessary for survival."

Huh. It was weird seeing George so suddenly bashful.

"Do you want to eat?" Dream said.

"I mean, I don't *not* want to eat. I don't have any feelings on the matter."

"Then eat." Dream pushed the plate of spaghetti closer towards the other side of the table. "It's the least I could do to repay you for saving my life so many times."

George furrowed his eyebrows, his lips pursing as if he were trying not to smile. His shoulders relaxed. "Well... thank you for the meal."

This was probably one of the most awkward dinners Dream had been present in. How the hell was he supposed to know how to talk to a literal angel? Would it be rude to ask about his past life? It'd probably be even ruder to ask about his death. Maybe he should ask about how heaven worked, but he couldn't think of any questions that George couldn't dismiss as stupid.

Dream glanced up.

Holy shit.

George smiled as he twirled the spaghetti around his fork. He watched it unfurl inch by inch, then put the forkful in his mouth and chewed thoughtfully.

What an angelic smile.

Dream directed his gaze back at his own unfinished plate and continued eating in silence.

"So... what do you wanna do?"

George wrinkled his nose as if he wasn't standing behind Dream while he lied down on the couch. "What do you mean?"

"It's still too early to go to sleep, but I already did all my errands yesterday."

"Oh, trust me, I'm aware. Painfully aware."

Dream rolled his eyes. "Isn't this whole guardian angel thing supposed to be your job?"

"I *am* doing my job! Do you know how many things almost fell on you at the supermarket? I was tempted to just let one fall on you, but out of the goodness of my heart—"

"Yeah, that's bullshit." Dream craned his head to look around his apartment.

What could he and George do? George looked to be around his age, but there was no way of confirming that without asking. Even if he had his age, he didn't have a clue what he liked to do.

"Do you feel like doing anything?" Dream asked. He sat up. "What do you do for fun? I mean, you have to have some interest in something..."

George sighed. "Dream, don't pay attention to me. The entirety of last month was me watching you make a fool out of yourself. Coming down to Earth just streamlined the process a bit more."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well..." George sat down where Dream's feet were a few seconds ago. "When a guardian angel is in heaven, they get a gut feeling whenever their charge is in danger. We can race down to Earth in the matter of seconds and come back in the same time, but we have a line of communication with heaven in case we have to stay longer."

Dream frowned. "Then why're you down here?"

"You almost die so often that it's just more convenient to be down here. Besides..." He looked away, and there was an air of uncertainty around him, as if he had taken a cloud from heaven and surrounded himself with it. "Doesn't that get boring sometimes? You wake up every day knowing that today might be your last, feeling the world do its damned best to make it your last, but you tell yourself that you're safe. It's always been like this, so why wouldn't it be safe? Your life isn't normal by any means, but nor is it a particularly exciting—oh my god, I almost forgot you have a cat."

And just like that, the cloud was lifted as soon as a cat slunk into the room. It walked a few steps to Dream before pausing and turning its head towards George.

"Here, kitty," George called. The amount of delight on his face rivaled a kid in a candy shop.

"Patches, actually," Dream said, leaning back. "Not Kitty. Honestly, I thought you'd know after watching me for a month."

George didn't respond, apparently too busy trying to draw the cat towards him.

After an awkward few hours of playing with Dream's cat and having stilted conversations over a game of Uno, the two agreed to retire for the night. And now Dream lied in bed, staring up at the ceiling while wondering what had gotten him into this mess.

The way George spoke implied that everyone (or at least the majority) had guardian angels who were meant to protect them. On the other hand, people died every day, so maybe he was full of shit. And seeing as how Dream didn't even know George existed until today, he assumed George would appreciate him keeping his existence a secret.

Still, what the hell? Heaven or God or whoever ran the show up there could've at least given him a warning before suddenly dumping an entire, literal man in front of him. The couch was the only place Dream could find for George to sleep (even if George insisted he didn't need to sleep, was Dream supposed to believe he couldn't feel exhaustion?). Thank god he even had a blanket to spare. In the day, he'd need to start buying more food. Even if George said he didn't need to eat, Dream wasn't willing to let that smile he saw at the dinner table slip past him.

But... the day had felt less empty. Dream loved Patches, but there was only so much of a void a cat could fill before he just became increasingly aware of what was missing. He had friends, even a few close ones he couldn't imagine life without. He was still close with his family who lived just a few hours away. He was on his start to a promising career. Yet some guy that fell out of the sky filled that void better than any of those. How?

That wasn't going to be easy to answer, and frankly, Dream didn't feel like putting any effort into answering it right at that moment. For now, he could bear spending a little extra on food and maybe buying some clothes that an actual human would wear in public.

It was the least he could do for his guardian angel.

Patches

Dream woke up to two weights pressed firmly on either side of his bed. Funny, considering there were exactly three entities that lived in this apartment.

He sat up, blinking away the blariness in his eyes. The blanket was heavy on his legs and pillow warm to the touch. A few drops of sweat had collected on his forehead. Wearing long pajamas to sleep during warm weather probably hadn't been a good idea.

The room was still dark. What time was it?

He rubbed his eyes and reached for his phone on the nightstand next to him, squinting when the screen lit up. Seven o'clock on the dot, an hour before his alarm was supposed to start ringing for work. He might as well disable that alarm for today.

He glanced to his left first, only to see Patches curled up next to his waist. Even though the cat fur was a pain to wash out, he couldn't bite back a smile. He would let it stay for a little longer.

On his right...

George was kneeled next to the bed with his arms crossed on the mattress, his head resting on top of his forearms. His face was exposed enough for Dream to see his eyes were screwed shut. His shoulders rose up and down with his breath. The breathing pattern didn't seem natural.

Dream leaned forward.

Now that he had a closer look, he noted the bags beneath his eyes. Was he not getting enough rest? Maybe George was the true disaster between the two of them.

"Almost died in your sleep just now, idiot," George murmured.

Dream's heart shot up to his throat and dropped back to its correct position when George's eyes remained closed. Good, he probably didn't notice him staring. At least, Dream hoped so.

His voice was soft and quiet as he continued speaking. "You were pulling the blankets over your head. Had to make sure you didn't suffocate. Sorry for being in your room."

Huh. That would explain all the frantic times his parents woke him up.

Dream allowed himself to stare for a bit longer.

George couldn't be comfortable using his own arms as pillows, could he? Dream had done the same when napping on airplanes. He always woke up with numb arms and a toothache.

Dream nudged a pillow away from him little by little until it hit George's elbow.

George snatched the pillow away and buried his face into it. Then he stilled and his breathing slowed. Dream could only assume the tension on his face was gone, too.

Was he actually asleep this time?

Dream looked closer, but there were no obvious signs he was still awake.

Good. He probably needed the rest.

Now, back to the question of how Dream was supposed to get out of his bed without disturbing either of the two.

His gaze darted between Patches and George.

Fuck it. Cats were asleep for more than half the day, right?

Sorry, Patches, Dream thought. He positioned his leg underneath where Patches slept. “Patches,” he whispered, “time to get up.”

Patches yawned and stretched its limbs. It directed a betrayed look at Dream before leaping off the bed and walking out of the room. How did one look stir so much guilt in his stomach?

He could make it up to Patches later. For now, he had a maze to go through.

Careful, Dream reminded himself as he slipped out of the blankets. Once his legs were free, he set his feet gently, lightly on the floor—

Fuck, his foot caught on the edge of the blanket.

Dream’s breath hitched, and he splayed out his arms in hopes of catching something, *anything* to break his fall. *This was a mistake, this was a mistake, this was a mistake—*

“You’ve been awake for what, five minutes?” came George’s voice.

And of course George ended up being the person to catch him right by the wrist before his body passed the angle of no return. Great. Exactly what he was intending.

Dream sighed as he righted his position. “Sorry. You can go back to sleep.”

“And leave you to die? I’m better off awake.” George released his grip on Dream’s wrist and walked out of the bedroom. He shouted back, “The cat wants food!”

Dream stared at the floor while rubbing his wrist.

This morning had been much more action-packed than his usual ones and had been slightly embarrassing. His heart was still pumping from almost falling flat on his face, and the one person he had to be around all day watched him make a fool of himself.

But...

Dream smiled.

That was fun. If mornings were like this, he wouldn’t mind anything else that came with it.

Dream took that back.

“You know there’s a shorter route, right? If you took a left instead of a right at the intersection, you would’ve shaved a couple minutes off your walk. It has a pretty good hot dog stand, too.”

“You could’ve told me when we weren’t standing outside my office building.”

George only laughed and caught him when Dream fell.

Again.

For the fourth time since he woke up.

Unluckily for him, George seemed to also be keeping track of his failures to function properly. “Why’re you so clumsy? That’s the fourth time this morning.”

“I should’ve left you on that dirt road,” Dream grumbled.

“I’m stuck with you, so you’re stuck with me. It only seems fair.”

“Well... yeah. I guess so.”

George tugged him aside just as a car went flying past, and the two continued into Dream's workplace.

“You’re missing a curly bracket at the end of that. You didn’t put a break in the sixty-first line of code either. You should fix that, don’t you think?”

Dream cursed under his breath, not daring to look back at the man sitting in the chair he stole from the conference room. He could picture the smug look George undoubtedly had on his face to the exact... skin cell? He was a programmer, not a biologist.

There was only one way Dream could communicate with George without drawing the attention of his coworkers.

Dream opened a word document and typed, *Fuck you. Aren’t you supposed to be, like, a million years old? You’re not supposed to know what computers even are.*

“Would a million-year-old know how to code in Java?”

You’re still a boomer at heart.

George scoffed. The chair creaked, which Dream could only imagine was the result of either him crossing his arms or legs. “I’ll have you know I’m only twenty-three.”

Twenty-three thousand.

“Oh, very funny. I only died just a few...” The volume of his voice tapered off until only silence was left. The silence was louder.

Dream risked snapping his head around for a split second, only to see George facing away from him with his knees curled up to his chest. His face wasn’t visible. He sat as still as a rock in what couldn’t have been a comfortable position in that small of a chair.

Dream’s throat tightened. He stared forward, the code on the screen swirling into a mess of black and white.

Fuck, they were at work. He worked in a corner of the office with people who wore headphones

while working, but the occasional coworker taking a break was unpredictable.

"George," Dream whispered. He paused, his gaze darting around for any sign of movement from his coworkers. "That was insensitive. I'm sorry."

When Dream took a cursory glance back again, George still faced away from him.

Dream felt he was pulled into the ocean, deeper and deeper where the light faded away and the pressure pushed into his skin. No matter how hard he kicked his legs, something dragged him further and further into the dark depths below. The pressure was crushing. The *silence* was crushing.

"It wasn't insensitive," George said. "You don't have to apologize."

Something stopped pulling on him, and he was left floating in the deep ocean with nothing but crushing depths and darkness.

They left it at that.

They were twenty minutes into another game of "how long can we distract Patches with a cat toy" before Dream finally worked up the courage to ask.

"Hey, George," Dream called. His stomach churned when George turned to look at him. "How quickly can you turn yourself into a human?"

George stopped to think, giving Patches the opportunity to snatch the toy out of his hand and drag it away. He glanced at the clock. "That's forty-three seconds it was distracted this time. I haven't had to take on my human form in a long time, but I estimate it'll take just a few seconds."

"And how long can you stay a human?"

"For as long as my energy allows me to. Why?"

Dream gulped, George's curious gaze burning into his skin. "Can you turn into one? Like, right now?"

George shrugged and stood up. "Sure. I'd prefer that you turn away while this happens."

Well, that was easier than he thought it would be.

Dream stood up as well, brushing cat fur off his hands. "I'm just gonna get some clothes for you. Are you fine with using mine in the meantime? I don't think you'd really want to go out in public in... that."

"What're you trying to say about my fashion sense?"

"Draws a lot of attention. Are you dissing *my* fashion sense?"

"Of course. Now go away."

Dream didn't need to be told twice. He turned his back on George and walked away to his room.

That went better than expected. George's mood after the office incident hadn't picked up significantly, but...

Patches lied down on the couch, batting away at the ball without a care in the world.

Dream's clothes tended to be oversized on him. But on George...

Dream didn't try biting back his laughter; he knew he wouldn't be able to contain it. "Hey," he said through a fit of giggles as George glared at him, "how do the clothes fit?"

"They don't. And take your socks back, your clown shoes won't fit me. My original shoes work fine," George said before balling up a pair of white socks and throwing it at Dream.

Dream only laughed and let the socks fall to the floor. "You have a pretty weak throw."

"Well, *I'm* sorry this flesh bag hasn't been in use recently!"

"Then shouldn't you work on maintaining it? And where'd your wings go? Did you just retract them or something? Is that a thing you can do?"

"And you're back to asking stupid questions. That's none of your business, isn't it?" George scoffed and flung the apartment door open. "Now, are you gonna lead me to wherever you wanna go or not?"

Dream smiled and walked out the door.

"Wait, is this...?" George flinched as a gust of wind blew in his face. When his eyes fluttered open again, his hand flew up to cover the grin on his face. "Dream, what are you—"

"What, you've never seen a clothes store before?" Dream said.

To be fair, he might not have seen this specific one. It wasn't a big store by any means; it was one of the small shops they passed on their way back from Dream's workplace (using the shortcut George pointed out, of course, because like hell Dream would let a good hot dog stand go unnoticed). The only person in the store was a cashier who seemed more occupied with a textbook hidden poorly behind the cash register than what would seem like an overreaction to being taken to a clothing store.

"Dream, no," George said, taking a step back. "That's too much. I'll be okay."

Dream took a step in. "You don't know how long you're gonna be stuck with me, right? I'm pretty sure you don't want to use my clothes all the time, so just let me buy some clothes for you."

"What? How am I gonna pay you back?"

"By not letting me die? You're pretty good at that already."

“No, I mean...” George stumbled over whatever was supposed to be his next words before sighing and hiding his face behind his hands. “You’re so annoying, you know that?”

“So you’re letting me buy you clothes?”

“One set of clothes. That’s it.”

“Alright, if that’s what you want,” Dream said with a shrug that was much more nonchalant than he felt.

Seeing people smile was a joy. Smiles made his own heart melt and do multiple flips in his chest, and he could never resist the dopey grin that would rise to his own lips.

This occasion was no different.

Seeing George flit about the aisles, checking price tags and adding snarky commentary when something was particularly contrary to his tastes... Dream believed firmly there was something magical about seeing his friends smile. Making other people happy, seeing their burdens lifted off them for even just a second—he loved it all.

Were he and George friends? Whatever their relationship was, his feelings remained the same:

He would always, always try to make George smile. No matter what.

More Similar Than I Thought

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A week flew by faster than Dream had anticipated. Even if George was a glorified roommate who happened to save his life every couple minutes or so, he had slowly integrated himself bit by bit into Dream's life without him noticing.

Sneaky bastard, Dream thought as he watched George squint at the laptop screen across from him at the kitchen table.

It was just some stupid Minecraft plug-in Dream had impulsively decided to code after tossing and turning in bed for too long. He probably would've finished it within the hour, too, if his traitor of a body hadn't tilted his chair just far back enough for the chair to tip over. George rushed into the room to catch him before he hit the ground, but the interface of Eclipse was apparently recognizable for him to know exactly what Dream was doing even with just a quick glance at the screen.

So here they were now, George scrolling through lines of code painfully slowly while Dream pretended he wasn't the least bit interested in George's opinion by staring intently at him.

Thankfully, George was too absorbed in his own world to notice. Light from the laptop screen streamed in rays onto his face, illuminating his already pale skin (whether that was an accurate representation of his human appearance or a side effect of being an angel, Dream didn't know). His slender fingers hovered over the keyboard, and every time they so much as twitched, Dream's breath hitched. His chin rested on the palm of his other hand.

His face was a blank slate but his eyes were a galaxy. Dream swore the entire universe within the computer swirled around him—constants, variables, expressions, keywords—all of them quietly made up the dark brown color Dream saw at that moment.

Passion. His eyes were ablaze with real, fiery passion for a field not enough people were passionate about.

Then the hand hovering over the keyboard rested on the table.

"I don't know why you were coding on a laptop when you have a computer," George started, his voice quiet, "but there's nothing incorrect with the code. It could definitely be neater, though."

George had thrown him an anchor back to reality. Dream reluctantly held onto the anchor and allowed it to drag him to shore.

Dream blinked, still waving away the fog of his thoughts. "Oh. Yeah, I was in a rush. Sorry."

"Why're you apologizing when I'm the one that demanded to see it? Idiot."

"Wow, okay."

"It's too early for this argument."

"That would be your fault, wouldn't it?" Dream said. Then he continued speaking before he could overthink and shut himself down. "How do you know all this coding anyway? Were you a

computer science major or something?”

Did George’s shoulders stiffen? Or was that a trick of the light?

“Worked as a freelance programmer,” George said. There was no tremble in his voice, no hesitation before he spoke. “I had to pick up some jobs here or there, but I like to think I built up a good portfolio.”

“With which languages?”

“A variety, really. People asked for Javascript most of the time, but I got to use Java, Python, and sometimes C++, too.”

A moment passed in which Dream forgot how to speak.

It’s not that a programmer learning four languages to a good level of understanding was unheard of. It’s just...

George? The same person he witnessed faceplanting into dirt?

“You look confused,” George said.

Dream shook his head and laughed at the mental replay of their first meeting. “I’m just tired.”

“I wonder why,” he snorted.

“Shut up. You’re fired. I want a new guardian angel that doesn’t mess with the AC.”

“And I want a human that doesn’t almost die every two seconds, but we can’t all have what we want. Now shut down your laptop and go to sleep.”

“No,” Dream said, doing exactly that.

George yawned and took his leave to the couch, where he collapsed on the cushions with a thud. His body stilled almost immediately.

Lucky bastard, being able to sleep on command.

But...

Programmer George was immensely different from Angel George. Or they were the same and George was enough of a sneaky bastard to hide that side successfully? Or Dream should stop caring about that mess and just go to sleep like he wanted to.

Yeah. That was a good idea.

Dream stood up from his chair, flinching when the edges of his vision blurred. His limbs creaked like an ungreased machine. Damn, he wasn’t even in his thirties yet. He needed to move more often.

He waited for his limbs to not feel like jelly before walking to his room and shutting the door behind him. He pushed his face into the smooth, cold surface of his pillow.

Impressive. George was impressive.

Dream’s own dream was to go into freelancing programming for video games. Would George even

consider mentoring him in that sense?

Shut up, brain. Don't be stupid.

Sunday mornings were slow, sleepy. Dream would roll out of bed just a few hours before noon. He'd brew his coffee and drink it while scrolling through memes on whatever social media platform he'd been feeling that morning, the only light in the house being his phone screen and whatever sunlight had managed to sneak its way in through the blinds.

Today probably would've had the same start if George hadn't swiped his cup of coffee from the coffee machine and prodded him about the plug-in he had been coding yesterday.

"You seriously changed into your human form just to take my coffee?" Dream said. The level of pettiness was almost impressive.

George rolled his eyes and held the cup close to him as if Dream was stupid enough to try rushing him while he held a cup of freshly brewed coffee. "Don't worry, I'll give it back to you after you show me how the plug-in from yesterday works."

"Isn't this technically blackmail?"

"Yeah, but who cares? It's a Minecraft plug-in."

"Me."

"And what're you gonna do about it?"

He had a point and he knew it. The level of smugness on his face was somewhere between not at all and the asshole rival with an iconic smirk in a video game.

Dream sighed and gestured for George to follow him into his room. It was an awkward minute waiting for his computer to boot up and run the plug-in, but once he got it running...

"Oh my god, Dream, can you please be more careful?" George breathed after Dream ran off the top of a cliff into a river only a few blocks wide.

With the way Dream was laughing, there was no breath left for him to spend on responding to his suggestion.

"Oh, what, like this?" Dream said right before running on the edge of a lava pool.

George made a pained sound that only increased in volume the closer he ran to the lava pool.

George had honored the agreement to return the coffee to Dream, but it was left ignored on the kitchen table. All the energy pulsing through Dream's body after every time George screamed at him to eat, to stop parkouring so recklessly, to not dig so close to lava— that excitement was his own product.

It had been a long time since he felt like that, actually. And despite George flinching every time Dream did something risky in the game, his face was radiant, glowing.

Maybe his brain wasn't so wrong last night.

"I just realized," Dream said over a lunch of egg salad. "You're so careful about me doing stupid stuff in Minecraft. Are those your guardian angel instincts kicking in?"

"Well," George said before looking up and spotting the smirk on Dream's face.

"Oh my god, were you really gonna answer that seriously?"

George flicked a piece of egg at him.

"So, no matter what I do, I can't get hurt as long as you're here?"

George rolled his eyes before releasing Dream's arm.

Dream fell to the floor, not knowing what he expected.

"I didn't know you had a leash," George said after looking through a cabinet close to the floor. He reached into it and placed a pink collar and leash onto the kitchen floor. "Did you take care of a dog recently?"

Dream bit his lip and stared silently into his cup of water. His reflection stared back at him. Why did it look so disappointed?

"Dream?"

"I tried to walk my cat once."

George snickered. "What?"

"I got bored and tried to walk my cat once, okay? I was young, I had some extra money, and my cat was just there."

"So you thought walking your cat was a logical move?"

"I mean... yeah?"

Immediately after he finished his sentence, George burst into a fit of laughter and lied down with his back on the floor, his knees curling up to his chest. Just when Dream thought the laughter would die down, he glanced at the leash again, and everything reset.

His laughter was contagious. Dream found himself smiling, then chuckling, then laughing along

with him, bent over in his chair holding his stomach.

It wasn't that funny. It really wasn't.

Then Patches walked into the kitchen, took one look at the leash and collar on the floor, and walked back out.

The laughter only grew more hysterical.

Thinking about food was decidedly much better than actually having to prepare the food himself. Even then, it was tricky, especially after the brain-frying his shift at work provided.

Dream's thumbs hovered over his phone's screen, and his eyebrows were furrowed. The blank sheet on the notes app of his phone had never spurred more frustration in him before.

Ugh, he was already sitting down. His office chair logically wasn't as bad as it could have been (Dream cringed when remembering those plastic blue chairs from hell in school), but there was something special about the cushions of his living room couch.

His mind was blanking. All he knew was if he didn't go out to buy food in the next few days, he and George would be living off cup ramen and hot sauce.

"Hey, George!" Dream called. "You wanna go to the fridge and tell me what we're out of?"

"I'm literally on the other end of the couch, idiot. You don't have to be so loud."

Dream looked up from his phone, only to see George staring back at him with eyes narrowed in the universal "why would you do that?" expression. "Oh. Sorry."

"And no, I don't want to. What would I even know about what's missing anyway?"

"You've been here for two weeks."

"Yes, a whole two weeks. Now get up."

Dream groaned and took a moment to stretch his legs before walking the whole fifteen feet to the refrigerator.

Fifteen feet? Ten feet? He never bothered to measure the distance.

He pulled the fridge door open, eyes scanning each level and drawer.

Okay. He used the last of the parmesan cheese and mushrooms on the pasta they had last night, just defrosted the last chicken breast from a giant pack he had frozen a month earlier, and gradually used all the slices of bread on lazy lunches over two weeks. And if the bread was gone, that meant he'd probably have to pick up some ham. The fruit and vegetable crispers were looking a bit empty, too...

"What're we missing from the pantry?" Dream asked.

Without so much as looking up from his book, George said, "Ran out of takis a couple days ago."

You'll probably want to buy some more crisps."

"What flavor?"

"The one you bought recently was barbecue."

Dream shut the fridge door and whipped around to face George. "You knew what was missing the entire time, didn't you?"

George cracked a smile at that. "What? No. Definitely not."

"Asshole." Dream pocketed his phone and grabbed the coat he had draped over a chair. "Anyway, come on."

"Sorry, too tired to be human."

"Yeah, me too. Are you coming or not?"

George sighed before standing up from the couch. After Dream looked away for a few seconds, he reappeared next to Dream with the apartment keys in hand. "Forgetting something?"

Dream took the keys and tucked them into his other pocket. "Nope. I was just testing you."

"Sure. Let's hurry, it's chilly outside. Not for me, but I can't save you from frostbite."

"You just hate the fact that we're in Florida, don't you? We can take the bus if you really want to avoid that, but there's gonna be some waiting for the next one to arrive."

There was a split second of dead air between them, but it was enough to make Dream's skin prickle.

"Why would I want to ride a bus when I can move faster than one?" George snorted. "There's so many rude people onboard."

"Then why don't you take me with you?"

"Why would I want to carry around dead weight?"

Dream gasped and held a hand to his heart. "Wow, how could you? All people taller than you are just dead weight?"

"Exactly. Now let's go." George swung the front door open and disappeared into the hall.

Something told Dream maybe he shouldn't board a bus during the time George was with him.

Chapter End Notes

im trusting a random youtube comment about the programming languages george knows. might be right, might be wrong.

Friends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was no reason Dream should have woken up at four in the morning to his phone spazzing out on his nightstand. Especially since the friend those notifications were from was only one hour behind him.

Dream mumbled a few colorful words under his breath before his arm shot out from underneath the blankets to grab his phone. Upon turning it on, he squinted at the bright light, just barely being able to make out the notifications.

Sapnap: hey

Sapnap: guess what

Sapnap: dude

Sapnap: its only 3 am howre u asleep

Sapnap: wake up

Sapnap: dream

Sapnap: this is important

Dream furrowed his eyebrows and frowned as he scrolled up on their conversation log. The last time they had texted was a full month ago. If Sapnap had fallen off the face of Earth and only returned now, it was probably as important as he claimed it was. At least, it'd better be.

Dream: what

Sapnap: finally

Sapnap: anyway

Sapnap: im on spring break in a couple days

Sapnap: and apparently theres a minecraft con close to your town during that

Sapnap: and i was wondering

Dream: i forgot you were in college for a second

Dream: ha imagine

Sapnap: shut up

Sapnap: im coming to florida for it and i have an extra ticket

Sapnap: was wondering if we could actually meet up this time

Sapnap: and have you not flake on me

Sapnap: but if u cant then thats fine, ill just invite one of my other friends

Dream: that was you standing me up actually

And it had been. They had come close to meeting in real life so many times (after they first met on a Minecraft server of all things), only for other circumstances to interrupt before they could. He wasn't about to give up the chance to see his friend, no matter how busy he was.

Well. It also helped that he wasn't very busy these days.

Dream: but yeah lets meet up

Dream: when're you coming?

Sapnap: on the 22nd specifically

Sapnap: dude

Sapnap: i can finally kick your ass in real life

Dream: ill give you five dollars if you actually win against me

Sapnap: alright bet

Maybe that wasn't such a good idea. George was already stressed enough as it was keeping him alive during his everyday daily routine; how would he fare when Sapnap came in and started pushing him around, even as a joke?

Oh, shit. George existed.

Dream: hey uh

Dream: i kinda have a roommate now

Dream: so im gonna talk about some stuff with them first

Sapnap: you told me we'd room together :(

Dream: nah, i hate you

Sapnap: wow ok

Sapnap: ill let you sleep now

Dream: can you just go to sleep like a regular human?

Sapnap: who said im human?

Sapnap: ;)

And on that terrifying note, their conversation ended.

Dream set his phone down, now alone in the blank darkness of his room.

Even if the grogginess of being woken up at four in the morning muffled all his senses, his heart bounced at the idea of finally meeting up with his long-time friend, after so many unexpected circumstances that pushed their meetup date further and further away. But life was different now that he essentially had... a roommate? It didn't feel right to call George that.

Whatever. Future Dream could think about this later.

Dream pulled his blankets back up to his shoulders and drifted to sleep.

Dream was going to kick his past self down a flight of stairs.

"So what you're telling me is," George said over a breakfast of coffee and eggs, "you and your friend are going to spar, and I'm the poor fucker who has to keep you alive during that?"

"I mean, when you put it *that* way..."

George shook his head.

It was only then that Dream noticed the bags underneath George's eyes were just a bit darker, his voice just a bit softer, and his energy just a bit less than it was before. George was an angel, but that probably didn't mean he didn't fall victim to exhaustion every once in a while.

"Listen, is that really the way you want to go?" George asked. "It isn't even your friend who's

gonna end up killing you. You're gonna trip over something stupid and I'll be too tired to catch you properly. That's at least a trip to the hospital. I'm not telling you what to do, I'm just saying this is a really bad idea."

"Okay. I guess I won't fight him then."

George blinked, then furrowed his eyebrows. "Wait, you're actually listening to me?"

"I'm surprised, too. Don't get used to it."

"But... you love being difficult. That's your thing."

Dream shrugged and waited until he swallowed his gulp of coffee before speaking. "Being alive is pretty good, too. I mean, not really, but I imagine it's a lot better than being dead."

"Well, you're right about that..."

The two finished their breakfast, George eating in contented silence and Dream wondering if Future Dream would be able to handle whatever was about to come.

"By the way, I was joking," Dream said. "The most he'll do is push me around a little."

"Yeah, I know."

"Then why'd you look so stressed?"

George laughed and flicked a piece of egg at him.

Guy in a white headband, guy in a white headband, guy in a white headband—

"Careful, too much thinking will kill your last brain cell," George snickered.

Dream opened his mouth to respond, only to shut it when he realized yelling at him to shut up wouldn't be a good look in public. He sent a quick glare in George's general direction before returning to his search for a man in a white headband.

A man in a white headband would probably be easier to find anywhere that wasn't the entrance to a Minecraft convention.

Then a man slightly shorter than him carrying a suitcase bumped into his shoulder, gave him a wide grin, and said, "Do you believe in love at first sight or should I walk by again?"

Dream froze. Faintly, he heard George laughing somewhere behind him.

White headband, check. Smug tone, check. Correct voice, check.

"Um... if your name isn't Dream, I'm so sorry. I'm meeting up with an online friend and that was the code we decided to use to see if we were really who we were. Sorry about the mixup, I'll just let you go on with your—"

"Sapnap, that was the worst thing I've ever heard come out of your mouth," Dream said, laughing.

Sapnap's eyes widened. "Dream? What the hell, man?" His expression sharpened into a half-hearted glare. "I thought I got the wrong guy. Do you know how awkward it would've been for me to use a random pickup line on a stranger?"

"I told you to use a pickup line, not a bad pickup line."

"What do you mean? It was perfect. We're meeting each other for the first time and everything."

"God, that was worse than the pickup line you used on me," George grumbled. "'Did you just fall from heaven?' What the hell was that, Dream?"

A snicker escaped Dream's mouth, which he immediately regretted in the moments after it had already happened.

Luckily, it wasn't too out of place in the conversation to laugh. Sapnap patted him on the shoulder and said, "Come on, we should get moving if we want to check everything out."

"Uh... you wanna put your suitcase in my car first?"

"... Yeah, actually. Thank you."

It was weird only being able to address one friend while actually being present with two friends. Was this how actors felt all the time about cameramen on movie sets?

"Promise me one thing, Dream," Sapnap said, his voice spiking when he stumbled on his way out of the booth. "Minecraft VR. Never again."

Dream shook his head in an attempt to shake the life-sized creepers and skeletons out of his head. "I don't know, wasn't it fun running around with creepers chasing you?"

"No, not at all," George murmured.

Dream risked a glance to the side, where George sat on the ground, his chest heaving up and down. George glared up at him. Maybe strapping on a VR headset when Dream knew he already wasn't the best at staying alive with his vision wasn't a good idea...

"Let's just stay here for a bit," Dream said. He leaned himself against a wall. He probably couldn't get himself in too much trouble in that position.

Sapnap nodded and followed suit, leaning against the wall and staring at the floor.

The two waited until they gathered their bearings to begin walking again. When Dream glanced back, he was met with a ghost of a smile.

"Oh my god, Sapnap, look! I found a perfect replica of you," Dream said.

Sapnap turned around with a smile that promptly fell flat upon seeing the potted oak tree sapling figurine in Dream's hands. "I hate you."

"I'm buying this for you."

"Oh, what—No, you're not, Dream," Sapnap said, his sentence ending in a chuckle.

"I am. You deserve it."

"Put the sapling down. I won't hesitate."

"Hesitate what?"

Sapnap picked up a potted Minecraft cactus and pointed it at Dream. "Put the sapling down, sir."

Dream bit his lip to hold back the laughter bubbling in his throat. "I'm afraid you'll have to take it by force."

"Excuse me?" came a third voice. "Could you please put the merchandise down if you're not going to buy them?" Uh oh.

Dream and Sapnap froze, exchanged a glance, then muttered apologies as Sapnap put the cactus down and Dream walked towards the cash register.

All the while George stood in the corner of the shop and laughed.

Dream couldn't help but smile at that.

"I can't believe you actually got this for me," Sapnap said. The potted sapling rested on his lap, nestled between the palms of his hands. "And that you're driving me back to my hotel. You could've just left me and I'd be fine."

Dream shrugged the best he could while driving and paused to make a turn. "You're, like, my best friend. Of course I would."

"Wow, that's sad."

"I know."

The night sky enveloped them, the roads illuminated by streetlamps and the headlights of other cars. Stars glittered in the sky, and the moon rose over the high buildings of the city. Time felt unreal. It was like the world had warped them into an exact copy of the world they used to be in: it was the same world, but nothing felt the same.

George was asleep in the backseat among Sapnap's suitcases and whatever random junk Dream had stuffed in his car. Would that mean his reaction time would be slowed?

Maybe. Dream tapped his fingers on the wheel, his legs tensing as if he were sitting on a chair of needles. He should be more careful.

"It's only ten," Dream said, "You're tired already?"

Sapnap tried to nudge him with his elbow, only to hit the middle compartment. “Oh, shut up. I didn’t even know you had a car. Why do you have a car? You live in the city.”

“Had it when I was home with my parents and I had to take my sister around a lot. I just took it when I left home.”

“Isn’t it expensive to maintain it?”

“I mean... it’s not so bad here. It’d definitely be a lot worse where you live. And the bus doesn’t always go everywhere, like my parents’ house.”

Sapnap nodded, seemingly satisfied with the answer. “Was it hard moving out? I mean, I know you didn’t go to college and we’re in different boats, but...”

Dream chuckled. “Dude, I’m one year older than you. Why’re you talking like I’m a boomer?”

“Because you are.”

“Shut up. Of course it’s hard, but it’s worth it, you know? You get privacy, autonomy... It just gets lonely sometimes.”

“Oh.” Sapnap paused. “Is it easier with your roommate?”

Dream smiled, careful to keep his urge to glance behind him in check. “Yeah, definitely. Only if you actually get along with them, though. Make sure they’re people you can actually trust.”

“Yeah, obviously. When I move out, can you help me with making the application?”

“Come on, man, you’re not stupid. I know you can make it and choose a roommate yourself. But if you want me to check over it or something, I’ll do it.”

Sapnap gave him a small smile. “Thanks. You’re a good friend.”

“Of course I am.”

“Nevermind, I take all of that back,” Sapnap said as Dream laughed. “I’m never talking to you again. I’m putting on the beats I listen to and ignoring you for the rest of the car ride.”

“Wow, ungrateful.”

“I am, and your music taste is trash.”

“Fight me right now.”

“You’d lose.”

“Sure.”

A comfortable silence settled over the two, and they admired the scenery of a late-night drive.

The parking garage was a shady place at all times of day, especially at night.

Dream looked around—nobody on his left, nobody on his right, nobody behind. He opened the passenger seat and whispered, “George, wake up. We’ve gotta walk home now.”

George stirred.

“George! Dude, wake up.”

No reaction.

Dream grabbed a plastic bag he had left in his car (from Chipotle? When was the last time he ate there?) and smacked it across George’s face.

George clawed at the bag, snatching it from Dream’s hands. “Oh my god, I hate you. You’re so annoying.”

Dream snickered and dropped the bag on the floor of the backseat. He would clean that up later. Probably. “Get up, we’ve gotta walk home before the real crackhead hours start in the city.”

“You didn’t almost crash a single time during that ride. I guess we should get going before you fall to your death.”

“Only in Minecraft, not in real life.”

George scoffed and stood up, waiting for Dream to shut the door behind him before scanning the parking garage. “Yeah, if you’re gonna die today, this is probably where you would.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“This is the shadiest—”

Dream’s phone rang in his pocket, prompting George to cut himself off. His eyebrows furrowed upon seeing the caller.

Dream held the phone up to his ear and said, “Sapnap? What’s up?”

“Hey, man. I just wanted to thank you for coming with me to the convention,” Sapnap said. His voice was tired, disappointed. It seemed like at any time he could hang up abruptly and never call him again.

“Is something wrong?”

There was a pause before he answered, “Apparently I bought a room right when they ran out, but they never told me they ran out of rooms. Which means I don’t have a room for the next week, so I’m gonna have to just... drive back to a motel that’ll take me for the night. I don’t think one’s close enough for me to stay for the entire trip, though, and all the other hotels had been booked for some big business conference, I think. I’m just gonna drive back to Texas after—”

“No, no, dude,” Dream said. His heart had sunken so far down his chest it had made its up to his throat, driving whatever words spilled out of his mouth. “Just stay at my place. Free of charge, complementary breakfast, it’s fine.”

Sapnap chuckled with no humor. “Dude, your roommate.”

“I’ll work something out with him. Just get an Uber or something back to my place, I’ll buzz you in.”

“No, that would be unfair to your roommate.”

“He just said he can crash at someone else’s place.”

“Oh, can I?” George said, barely stifling his laughter.

Dream moved to kick at George’s ankle before retracting it upon realizing that probably wasn’t his brightest idea. “Seriously, just come over. I’ll, like, fluff the pillows for you and everything.”

“That’s a lie,” Sapnap said, chuckling. Finally, the cloud of misery hanging over their conversation had been blown away. “Are you completely sure this is fine with your roommate?”

Dream held the phone down at waist-height and glanced at George.

George shrugged. “I don’t own your life.”

Dream brought the phone back to his ear. “Yeah, he’s cool with it.”

Sapnap laughed. “Oh my god, today was so wild.” There was a rustling on the other end of the call before he spoke again. “I’m getting an Uber. Thanks so much, man. I’ll pay you back.”

“No, shut up. You’re not paying me back anything.” When a low tone played, Dream looked at the phone screen, then turned to George. “He hung up. If he tries to pay me back, am I allowed to kill him?”

“No,” George said.

“What if I promise I don’t get hurt?”

“Knowing you, you would lose a fight with a dust particle.”

“Wow, okay. Whatever. We should get going now.” Dream pocketed his phone and took a few steps towards the exit. He stopped. “Just to be clear, you’re okay with this, right?”

George blinked, then shook his head. “Dream, you’re being ridiculous. Just live your life.”

“But I won’t be able to do anything for you for a week.”

“You didn’t need to do anything in the first place.”

“But you’re my friend.”

Silence.

“I’m your friend?” George said. “Even though I’m not really a normal...”

Dream shrugged. Seeming nonchalant was tough when his skin prickled from the sudden cold air that had enveloped them. “You act pretty normal. So you’re my friend.”

There was another stiff moment of silence between the two before George laughed, shooting Dream a sunny, radiant smile Dream couldn’t help but smile back at.

Friend. What a nice word.

my goal for dream and sapnap's friendship was to establish a kind of brotherly best friend type relationship between them and to intergrate the casual flirting some friends do. i hope you enjoyed <3

Goggles

Chapter Notes

im tired of looking at this so here u go

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Who's this ratty homeless man who showed up on my doorstep? How'd you get my address?"

"I hate you, Dream."

"And he knows my name." Dream laughed and scrunched his nose to make his next words nasally. That's what witches sounded like, right? "Welcome to my lair, Sappitus Nappitus."

George's laughter rang out in the room while Sapnap entered, his suitcase trailing behind him.

"Not too happy at being called that," Sapnap said, "but thanks for letting me stay here. Really."

Dream shrugged. "It's nothing. Do you want the bed or the couch?"

"Let's be honest here. Would you really let me have your bed?"

"No."

"Knew it."

The rest of the night was spent pulling out various boardgames Dream didn't know he owned and yelling at each other for "cheating," because apparently cheating at boardgames was a thing either of the two would know how to do. George had the courtesy of keeping quiet for most of the night, though even the threat of Dream saying the wrong thing at the wrong time wasn't enough to keep him from throwing out the occasional insult.

But eventually, the night came to an end.

Dream dug through a closet and tossed out a light blanket in Sapnap's direction. When he turned around, he was met with Sapnap's best cosplay of a ghost.

"You want some scissors to cut out eye holes in that?" Dream said.

A storm of chuckles erupted from underneath the blanket. "I'd rather have—"

"Go to sleep, Sapnap. Your pickup line quota resets tomorrow."

There was no reply, but Dream could recognize the beginnings of a snore when he heard it. Sapnap being able to sleep sitting upright was nothing new.

Dream lifted the blanket just enough for air to pass into and out of the space underneath before stretching his arms. The floor was littered with stray game pieces that would be picked up next morning when his eyes weren't half-drooped over his face—

His foot caught on the Game of Life box. How fitting.

Dream's heart leapt to his throat as his body dropped closer and closer to the ground. Then right when his nose was an inch from the ground, a pair of hands caught him.

"You're later than usual," Dream said as he was brought to stand upright.

George snorted and rolled his eyes. "Just reminding you of your place. Can you get to bed already? It's prime accidental death time."

"Gee, thanks." Still, Dream walked carefully to his room, mindful of the game pieces they had left haphazardly lying on the ground. When he shut the door behind him, he remembered.

"Wait," Dream said, "we don't have a bed for you."

George shrugged. "I don't need to sleep. Just because I get tired doesn't mean it's from sleep deprivation."

"But it does help."

"My performance doesn't really depend on sleep. I'll still save you after you make some stupid mistake, sleep or no sleep."

"That's not really what I'm concerned about."

George blinked, and Dream wondered just how disconnected George was from the concept of friendship.

"Just because you don't need sleep doesn't mean I don't want you to get some," Dream said. "Isn't that what humans spend most of their life doing?"

"Which means I don't have to spend any more time on that."

"What're you gonna do for the entire night, watch me sleep?"

"I mean... yeah. Probably keep you from suffocating in your blankets every now and then, but essentially yes."

Dream grinned. "Am I really pretty enough for you to stare at for eight hours?"

"No." George rushed to sit on the chair at Dream's desk, hugging his knees to his chest. He rolled his eyes just when he thought Dream wasn't looking. "You're literally so annoying. I'll just sleep on the chair."

"Won't your back hurt?"

"As if I can feel pain from something like that."

"Okay, edgelord." Dream tossed a pillow at him. "Here, sleep with this. Do you want me to dig out a blanket?"

George took the pillow and set it on the armrest. He stared at Dream as if he had dropped an egg at the grocery store (which had only happened once but was apparently something he decided Dream would never live down). "Why're you doing this? You know I'm an angel. I don't really have the same needs as a human."

"Because we're friends? Do you not know what friends are, George?"

George fell silent.

Dream's heart dropped to his stomach. "Wait, I'm really sor—"

"No, of course I've had friends, you idiot," he snorted. "I'm just having trouble wrapping my head around you choosing to be friends with someone who's not even alive."

This was not a conversation Dream wanted to be having at three in the morning. Dream boxed his questions for another day and said, "Are you sure about that first part? Doesn't seem like it to me."

"I hate you," George fumed. But his shoulders looked just a little bit lighter. He turned away, turning the chair with him. "Anyway, I don't need a blanket. Just go to sleep."

"If you drag the chair close to the bed, it'll be like putting our beds together in Minecraft."

"Shut up."

"Fine, fine." Dream turned off the light and slid under the covers of his bed. He fumbled around for the phone charger on his nightstand, then plugged in his phone and pulled his blankets over his head.

Even as heavy as his eyelids were, his mind refused to shut off. All kinds of systems ran in the background, from the one in control of his kindergarten memories to the one that tried to process what had just happened. The task manager in his head was unreachable.

It seemed George's wouldn't shut off either.

"You kind of remind me of my best friend," George said, his voice soft and quiet.

Dream opened his eyes and lowered his blankets.

Streams of moonlight filtered in through the blinds they didn't care enough to close completely. Most of it was splattered over the bed, but some had landed on George. He had lifted his hand as if he were reaching out to the heavens, moonlight illuminating his hand and wings. It felt intensely private, intimate, like a scene Dream shouldn't be witnessing.

"He used to badger me a lot about my sleep even though we both knew his sleep schedule was worse. Always bothered me when I was online at odd times. Even sent me a blanket from overseas once."

"Overseas?"

"He was an online friend. We only met one time." George turned his hand, rearranging the strips of moonlight. "I wonder how he's doing sometimes."

Dream shut his eyes. "Do you miss him?"

His words faded into silence.

Dream opened his eyes again, only to see George had retracted his hand. The back of the chair was turned towards him.

No answer came.

For all the chaos that had happened last night, Dream woke up to a relatively peaceful morning.

“Did you clean up the game pieces from last night?” Dream asked, rubbing his eyes as he walked into the kitchen. “And since when did you wake up earlier than me? Isn’t your sleep schedule destroyed?”

Sapnap huffed. “Wow, not even a ‘Good morning.’ I’m even making you breakfast, I set an alarm and everything. What kind of friend are you?”

“You don’t need to make me breakfast, you know.”

“I know, but you’re letting me stay here. I might as well. And no, I didn’t clean up the game pieces.”

In hindsight, that was a stupid question to ask. Dream shrunk. He was certain a pair of eyes were burning into his back, staring at him in disappointment.

Thankfully, Sapnap remained focused on plating the pan of scrambled eggs in front of him. “You willing to show me around the city today? Or do you have something else you want to do?”

“Nah, I’ll take you around.” Dream eyed the two plates of scrambled eggs. There was nothing else on the side. “Sapnap, is scrambled eggs the only thing you know how to make?”

“Maybe I just really wanted scrambled eggs. Have you ever considered that?”

Dream stared.

“... Okay, you can’t blame me. You know I used to know how to cook, then my school forced all freshmen to have a meal plan in their cafeteria. It’s their fault.”

“Whatever you say.”

“Oh, yeah,” Sapnap said, setting the plates down on the table. “Did your roommate come back last night? I heard you talking to someone last night after the whole blanket ghost thing.”

Fuck. He thought he was asleep.

Dream looked away. He wasn’t a bad actor by any means, but if anyone would be able to see through his mask, it was Sapnap. “Nah, I called him. Don’t worry, nobody else saw your horrible impression of a ghost.”

Sapnap laughed. “Why’re you looking away? Is my face just that beautiful?”

“I see where you get your sense of humor,” George said. He sat on top of a cleared counter space. “From... Snapnap?”

A smile tugged at Dream’s lips.

Uh oh.

Dream burst out into hysterical laughter. The laughter grew more intense as Sapnap stared at him in confusion, and soon he was sprawled on the table, holding his stomach.

“What?” Sapnap said.

“Snapnap,” was the only thing Dream could squeak out before collapsing in laughter again.

Sapnap scoffed and rolled his eyes but grinned. “Call me that again and we’re gonna have issues. Where’d you even come up with that?”

“I don’t—I don’t know, it just popped up in my head.” There was still a smile on Dream’s face, but his laughter had died down.

“Oh, I should probably…” Sapnap stood up and removed the pan from the stove, walking forward to the counter George was with the pan in hand—

George scrambled out of the way and landed on the ground.

Dream burst out laughing again, and they spent the rest of the morning telling jokes over a plate of scrambled eggs.

Dream’s city was admittedly boring. Somewhere between passing the same cafes and clothes stores (including the one he and George had visited at one point. George didn’t seem as excited as Dream did), they had ended up at an arcade Dream didn’t even know existed.

Luckily, as far as Dream knew, Sapnap’s spring break hadn’t coincided with the county’s spring break. A few stray teens and adults were strewn about the area. The amount of staff was sparse.

“Dude, we’re gonna look like weirdos,” Sapnap said. “It’s so quiet in here.”

Dream snorted and walked further into the arcade. “Since when did you care about that?”

“Never. I was just wondering if you would back out of this like a coward.”

“Since when did *I* care about that?”

When Sapnap’s eyes twinkled and George suddenly looked much more alive, Dream regretted every decision that had led to this moment.

“Well,” Sapnap started. He didn’t get very far before Dream slapped a hand over his mouth and immediately retracted it.

Dream wiped his hand on Sapnap’s shirt. “Ew, did you just lick my hand? What are you, twelve?”

“Maybe, maybe not.”

“Whatever. You’re paying for your own arcade credits.”

“I’m fine with that.”

Somewhere during the middle of their play session, Dream had learned the following: Sapnap was

not to be trusted with the Dance Dance Revolution machine, Dream was not to be trusted with carrying popcorn, and George *was* to be trusted with claw machines.

“How’re you supposed to get anything with that flimsy claw?” Sapnap said after failing at the claw machine for the third time. “I swear, these are rigged.”

Dream shrugged. “They kind of are.”

“Dream,” George whispered as Sapnap rambled about the flaws of claw machines.

You know I’m the only one who can hear you, right? Dream thought with an eye roll. Still, he turned the slightest bit towards George.

“Put some coins in the machine,” George said, “I’m really good with these. You put your hand on the claw, I’ll guide you. Okay?”

This was such a bad idea.

“Come on, let me try,” Dream said with his arcade card in hand.

Sapnap blinked, then stepped closer to the window of the machine. “I’ve never seen you win anything from these kinds of machines.”

“I’ve been practicing. Not like I’ve got much better to do in this city anyway.” Dream slid his card through the slider and waited for the machine to activate before setting his hand on the joystick.

“Is he doubting me?” George snorted. Did he really see that as an attack on him? “I’m gonna prove him wrong. What does he want?”

“Hey, what do you want?” Dream said.

Sapnap shrugged. “I’ll be amazed if you can get anything from there. Literally just get anything.”

With that, George set his hand on top of Dream’s and moved.

George’s palm was smooth and cool to the touch. His fingers slid into place in the gaps between Dream’s fingers (ha, tiny fingers). Dream didn’t know exactly how collision physics worked for angels or if he was feeling George’s real hand at all instead of some ghostly aura, but...

It was nice. Casual contact with a new person—he hadn’t felt that in a while.

“Press the button now,” George said before Dream could think any further.

Dream tapped the button and watched.

The claw descended into the mass of dolls, its four grips eventually latching onto the head of a minion doll. The three held their breaths as the claw ascended, moved towards the goal, and—

“Oh my god, you actually did it,” Sapnap breathed. Then he laughed. “Wait, why’d you get the minion doll out of all of them?”

Dream shrugged and bent down to free the minion from its captivity in the machine. “It was just the easiest to get, I guess.”

Even knowing only Dream could see him, George gave Sapnap a smug grin. “That’s for your friend,” he said.

“Here, take it.” Dream held it out to Sapnap. “Souvenir from Florida.”

A minion doll. Perfect souvenir.

“I love you, Dream,” Sapnap said, his voice cracking at the end with laughter as he took the doll.

They spent the rest of their time at the arcade bantering and laughing.

By the time they felt satisfied with the amount of tickets they earned, it was six at night and Dream’s body ached like the old man he had become.

“Ha, boomer,” Sapnap cackled when Dream voiced his complaints. “You’re getting old, Dream. What are you, seventy?”

“Twenty, actually.”

“Same thing.”

Sapnap had already picked out a panda doll and a packet of takis to spend his points on. (It was amazing how little six hours of gameplay got them, but if Sapnap was happy, Dream was, too.)

“You haven’t picked a single thing yet,” Sapnap said. “You might wanna hurry up before your bones turn to dust.”

Dream rolled his eyes, then his gaze fell on George.

George stood next to him, staring thoughtfully at a pair of (probably fake) clout goggles hanging on the wall. His eyes were cloudy, soft. When was the last time Dream had seen that look on his face? Never?

Getting the goggles would take away all of his tickets, plus the ones Sapnap had leftover.

It wasn’t even a question.

Dream lifted the goggles from the rack they hung on and presented them to Sapnap. “Hey, can I use the rest of your tickets to get this? I just barely have enough.”

A pair of eyes burned into his back. He ignored it.

Sapnap shrugged and handed him the rest of his tickets. “Sure. But why clout goggles? You never mentioned anything about being a hypebeast.”

“I just want to give it to someone.”

“You’re gonna give a hypebeast a fake pair of clout goggles?”

Dream shrugged as he exchanged the tickets at the register.

The first thing Dream did when he returned to his room for the night was hold out the pair of goggles to a confused angel.

George only stared. “What’re you doing? You want me to hold onto them? I kind of can’t. There’d just be a floating pair of goggles if people saw.”

Dream stared back. “No, these are for you, idiot.”

“... For me?”

“Yes? Who else would they be for? Try them on.”

George stammered for a bit before sighing and taking the glasses from Dream. He put them on in a swift motion, then fumbled with the temples.

The glasses were clearly made for children: the temples were too close together to be comfortable, the bridge would probably leave red marks on his skin if he turned into a human right then, the rims were far too wide. But the bright smile tugging on George’s lips told him none of that mattered.

“I can’t believe you spent all your tickets on this garbage,” George said, laughing. By the time he took off the goggles, a grin stretched across his face and there was a glimmer in his eyes Dream couldn’t quite place. “Absolute idiot. Why’re you giving me stuff I can’t even do anything with most of the time? Don’t do this again.”

Dream held a hand to his heart and feigned an offended gasp. “Wow, I do this for you and you just reject my gift like that? I see how it is.”

“Dream, I swear—”

Dream stifled his laughter behind a hand.

George huffed and collapsed onto Dream’s chair (well, he supposed it was George’s now), fiddling with the goggles. The frown on his face softened into a tiny smile. “I’m not really even much of a hypebeast anyway. I used to buy Supreme gear and sell it online.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah. I played Minecraft a lot since, like, I was a child.” He dissolved into a fit of giggles. “I put clout goggles and a Supreme shirt on my Minecraft skin. It was so stupid, I don’t remember why I did that.”

Dream laughed along and shut the lights off. “Did you play on any servers?”

“Um... I was one of the coders for Munchy for a while.”

“Oh, I used to play on there.”

“Then we might’ve seen each other at some point.”

Dream shrugged, climbing under the covers and charging his phone. “That’s kind of wild.”

The chair turned enough for George to see Dream. “That’s all you have to say about that?”

“What? It is.”

George scoffed and rolled his eyes as if Dream couldn't make out the outline of a smile on his face.
"Go to bed. You have work again in two days."

"Okay, Mom."

"Don't call me that."

A comfortable silence fell over them, and a few minutes later, Dream would pretend he didn't hear George laughing quietly to himself and see him putting the goggles on himself, spinning in the chair like a child.

Chapter End Notes

if you'd like to see something beautiful please direct your eyes to fanart Vic has done for this chapter:
<https://dontrollthedicesideblog.tumblr.com/post/621782706874875904/i-think-this-is-how-tumblr-works-never-used-it>

Think Fast

Monday came as quick as a heartbeat.

“I gave you a spare key last night in case you want to step out and go somewhere,” Dream said, pacing around his living room while Sapnap and George watched in concern. “I work from nine to five on weekdays, so I should be able to see you off back to college. You can help yourself to anything in the fridge. You can go into my room and use anything on my computer, but don’t go into the files. When you leave the house, make sure to lock the door behind you. If you want—”

“Okay, Dream, I get it,” Sapnap said. “Just go to work, okay? I’ll text you if I burn anything down.”

“If you burn my apartment down, you’re paying for it.”

“Ouch. I’m on a student budget, man, my wallet is crying already.”

“Easy solution: just don’t burn it down.”

“Steep promise to make, but sure.”

"Just throw me my keys, will you?"

Sapnap felt around the counter behind him, wrapped his fingers around an apple, and tossed it towards him.

Dream froze. Time slowed to a stop, and there were three things he noted: One, an apple was a hard, dense object. Two, his face, while protected by a skull, couldn’t handle being hit very well. Three, an apple was coming straight for his face and he wouldn’t be able to move in time.

“No!” came a shout before he was pushed to the side and sent scrambling to catch his balance. The apple went rolling to the wall and bounced off, forgotten.

Dream’s eyes were wide and his heart pounded. His gaze was trained directly on George, who glared back at him.

“That thing was headed straight for your head,” George spat, arms crossed. “Were you really just gonna stand there and take an apple to the head? You absolute idiot. Do all your reflexes go into playing Minecraft?”

Then a third voice said, “Um... you good there, Dream?”

Oh, shit. Sapnap was still there.

Dream whipped his head towards Sapnap and said, “Those weren’t my keys.”

“Yeah, I thought I would just give you some breakfast on the go, but that didn’t go as well as I expected.” Sapnap turned his head to take a good look at the counter, then tossed him his actual keys gently. “Sorry, man. I didn’t know there’d be so much force put into that.”

Dream bent down to pick up the apple and shot him a smile. “No worries, I know you didn’t mean to. Unless you intended to assassinate me.”

“Assassinate? You’re not nearly important enough for that word to be used.”

“Wow, thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” Sapnap frowned. “But seriously, sorry about that. Let me buy you dinner later.”

“It’s okay, you didn’t—”

“What was that? I can buy you dinner? Okay, cool, see you later.”

Dream glanced down at his watch. He had to leave. He sighed, waved a goodbye to Sapnap and started speed-walking after closing the door behind him.

“You’re literally so bad at staying alive,” George said.

Dream rolled his eyes. “Dude, it was an apple. Did you really have to step in?”

“Well, I don’t want you to get hurt. That could’ve given you a nasty bruise.”

“But it wouldn’t have killed me.”

“Maybe it would have. You don’t know. You’re not the one with supernatural future-seeing powers.”

“Are you?”

George pursed his lips and stayed silent, prompting laughter from Dream.

“You were so dramatic about it, too,” Dream said through his laughter. “You went, ‘*No!*’ like I was being murdered or something. It was like something out of some one-star action movie.”

“Add another two stars to that. It deserves at least that.” George paused to tug Dream to the side.

Dream blinked, the wind of a biker passing by blowing against his arm. nodded when the biker shouted a quick apology. He stood still and noted George still hadn’t released his shirt.

“Dream? Hello?”

“Yeah, okay,” Dream said. “Three stars.”

“Seriously, dude, you didn’t need to get me dinner.”

“Do you want me to throw it away?”

“Well, no, but—”

“Then shut up and eat your food.”

Dream squinted at the deceptively innocent smile on Sapnap’s face, then sighed and dug a fork into the takeout box. “Thanks, though. It was a long day at work.”

Sapnap raised an eyebrow. “You actually talk to people at your workplace? What happened?”

“No, I don’t really talk. But, you know.”

George in a chaotic mood was a force to be reckoned with. And with George knowing Dream couldn’t react, he was free to do whatever he wanted. Being prodded and teased for eight hours straight was not fun.

“Anyway,” Dream said, “what’d you do all day without me?”

Sapnap paused to think, then started recounting his experience wandering through the city, embellishing his words with hand gestures and emphasis.

Dream hummed and nodded at the appropriate times and buckled himself in for a long night.

"Dream, think fast!"

That was the only warning Dream had before Sapnap tossed a fork in his direction. Dream held his hands out, his eyes desperately tracking it before—

Its downward trajectory suddenly gained speed and clattered against the floor. The wing of the person who slapped it down was only visible to one of them.

Dream snickered.

Chuckles escaped Sapnap’s throat, then evolved into full-blown laughter.

Soon, they were both keeled over in laughter, holding their stomachs and imitating the sound of the clatter while George stood by with crossed arms, smiling and shaking his head.

“Damn, dude, your coding really improved,” Sapnap said, scrolling through various lines of code on Dream’s computer. He leaned back in the chair and tilted his head to smile at Dream. “I’m really proud of you.”

Dream scoffed and rubbed the back of his neck, his heart warming. “Shut up. You sound like such a dad right now.”

“Really? Then you should call me—”

“Finish that sentence and I’m kicking you out of my house.”

Sapnap laughed, knowing Dream didn’t have the heart to kick out his best friend. “How’d you learn all this in such a short amount of time anyway? You never said you were doing anything productive when I texted you.”

Dream’s gaze fell on George, who stood in the corner of the room, mouthing some song Dream could probably figure out if he was better at reading lips. He could feel his grin melting into a fond smile, but when his heart wanted to do something, it was going to do it. No stopping that. “My

roommate's a really good programmer, actually. He taught me a lot of stuff."

"I can tell. There's no way you could write code this neatly. That roommate of yours must be amazing."

Now, they had George's attention.

George's lips twisted as if he were desperate to hold back a grin before he ultimately settled on hiding his mouth behind his hand (Not like that made a difference. Crinkled, shiny eyes always meant a genuine smile). His head was tilted away, but the split second glances he made in their direction weren't quite as quick as he thought they were.

Dream chuckled and finally allowed a warm smile to break through to his face. "Yeah, I guess he is."

One sentence was enough to send chills down Dream's spine.

"Since when did you wear medium sized shirts?" Sapnap asked with a frown. He pulled a familiar dark gray shirt out of the closet and turned around to Dream, its hanger hooked onto his index finger.

George sighed and smacked his palm against his forehead. "You really put our clothes together and thought that wouldn't be suspicious? You're such an idiot."

Dream almost rolled his eyes. Leave it to him to completely doubt Dream was capable of anything.

Sapnap may know him, but Dream knew him, too. Now that he had more time to consider his mannerisms, it shouldn't be too hard to lie.

"My brother comes over a lot," Dream said. "I keep a spare set of outfits for him."

"Your brother who only just got his driver's license?"

"No, I'm lying, you idiot. My roommate must've left some stuff behind. There's not a lot of space in the apartment, so we just share a closet."

"Oh." Sapnap hung the shirt back onto the rack. "Then I probably shouldn't mess with it. Short people are the angriest people."

"I'm not short!" George shouted from the corner of the room.

Dream snickered, pointedly ignoring George's glare when he did so. "Yeah, they are."

Staying up until two in the morning probably wasn't a good idea in the middle of the week when Dream had work, but what else was he supposed to do when his friend was kicking his ass at Monopoly? Not retaliate by kicking his ass at Uno? Unbelievable.

And now they were both sprawled over the floor, exhaustion finally settling in their bones.

“Dude,” Sapnap mumbled, “I still remember when you blocked me on Skype over me killing you in Minecraft. What the hell was that?”

Dream had to laugh at that. “You promised you wouldn’t, then you did.”

“No, I didn’t. I don’t remember what I promise, but it sure wasn’t that.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Children,” George said, shaking his head. He sat cross-legged on the floor in between the two. “You two are absolute children.”

Dream rolled his eyes, and of course, George pretended he didn’t see.

“I miss playing Minecraft together,” Sapnap said. “What happened to that channel you said you would make? You know, the one with the Minecraft plug-ins?”

Dream groaned and buried his face into a pillow. His skin crawled where he was certain George was eyeing him curiously. “We don’t talk about that. Let’s just not bring it up.”

“Okay, then what do we talk about? Your roommate who you may or may not be dating?”

Not even a split second passed before Dream burst into laughter. Somewhere in the midst of his laughter, he could vaguely make out George’s light chuckles.

Sapnap gasped and shot up. “I knew it! You don’t even have a roommate, do you? Was that just a cover story?”

“Sapnap, I can’t right now—” A fit of giggles interrupted Dream, eventually fizzling out into a wheeze. “Cover story—what am I, an undercover cop? What’s wrong with you?”

“What else am I supposed to think? I can literally hear you talking to someone after the point where you’re supposed to be asleep every night.”

“You can hear me?”

“I mean, not completely, but still. Are you saying I’m wrong?”

“If I was dating someone, why would I not just tell you? I’ve told you about my past relationships.”

“I don’t know, they might be, like... a drug lord or something and you needed to protect their identity.”

“You’re such an idiot,” Dream said, his laughter finally dying down. “No, I really do have a roommate. I’m not hiding a girlfriend or boyfriend or whatever from you.”

Sapnap sighed, inhaling all the energy left in the room and exhaling pure exhaustion. “You

would've introduced me to them at some point, man. Just saying."

That was factually correct, and they both knew there was no room for debate there. Dream's history with Sapnap had always been honest and straightforward. There would be no reason for Dream to keep something from him, much less an entire person.

But was two in the morning really the right time to have a discussion about Dream maybe having a friend who wasn't quite human or about the existence of things beyond the mortal realm? Right after they spent the past five hours screaming at each other over Monopoly and Uno? George had been silent throughout that entire conversation; what was he thinking?

"Go to sleep, Sapnap," Dream said with a yawn. His eyelids tugged down even through his efforts to keep them up. "We'll talk about this later, okay?"

There was no response from Sapnap other than a light snore.

They never ended up talking about it.

If TGIF Thursday was a thing, Dream would gladly coin the term and claim himself king.

"Dude, this is, like, the perfect date," Sapnap said, turning his head to take in the city from all angles. "First you treat me to dinner, now we're just walking around town. Next thing I know, you're gonna take me to a festival and win a plushie for me."

"No," Dream said.

"Damn. Heart been broke so many times I don't know what to believe."

"You know, it's really weird hearing you just say that and not sing that."

"I do know."

Thursdays were the best nights to have dinner out with friends, at least in Dream's town; most people tended to wait until Friday or Saturday to let loose, whether it be with family or friends. Tonight was no exception. The restaurant they went to hadn't been empty, but it wasn't so busy they had a hard time hearing each other.

And now they walked on a path along a river on the outskirts of town. The air was deliciously humid and the clouds above them just fluffy and gray enough for Dream to be wary of rain. The only sounds that played were their footsteps and the rush of water.

Sapnap stopped walking and turned to stare at the rushing water just a few feet away from them. "I have no idea why you guys haven't put rails next to this thing yet. I would've thought some kids would've come in and slipped and ruined it for everyone."

"Same, but it's Florida. I think a lot of people here just grow up learning not to fuck with nature," Dream said. He inched closer to the water, wincing when water oozed out of the dirt beneath his shoes. "Ugh, it's been raining so much lately. It feels like stepping in water with your socks on."

George, whose foot was in the air in preparation for following him closer to the river, stepped back and wrinkled his nose. "Ew, why would you say that?"

A chuckle escaped Dream's lips as Sapnap stepped closer to the river.

Sapnap rolled his eyes. "I get the squeaky noise is funny, but come on."

"You think it's funny, too."

"Yeah, I do," Sapnap laughed. He stuck his hands in his pockets and leaned in to look at his reflection in the river. "You know, I never thought I'd be standing here with my Minecraft pen pal when we first met."

Dream stepped closer to the river and kneeled down, watching rocks shoot through to who knew where the river led. Sapnap was right; why hadn't this been blocked off long ago? He couldn't imagine falling into a river of jagged rocks would feel too comfortable.

Dream shrugged. "Me neither. It's kinda incredible."

"It is."

There was a lot Dream could have said to that. He could've made any combination of comments on how grateful he was that he met Sapnap in the first place, how thankful he was for his current comfortable life, even how in some twisted way he was glad the hotel had messed up—but he didn't. He allowed unsaid words to linger in the air, long enough for them to stick around but not so long their meaning was missed.

No words or glances were exchanged, but some part of him told him Sapnap understood anyway.

Finally, Dream lifted his head to look at Sapnap. "Looks like it's gonna rain soon again. Let's head back."

Sapnap's response was glance up at the sky, then a quick nod. He turned, planted his foot into the ground, then time stopped.

Dream's mind ran in overdrive but his body refused to move a muscle.

There were three connections his mind made right then and there: One, the dirt in the river bank had been displaced over days of inconsistent rain. Two, the river bank was tilted, meaning whoever was unfortunate enough to slip would also be unfortunate enough to make contact with very unfriendly-looking rocks at the bottom of the river. Three, his best friend was about to be one of those unfortunate people.

Dream's heart stopped as he watched realization, then horror fill in Sapnap's eyes.

What could he do? Oh, god, what could he do—

No, no, no—

Move, move, *move*—

And someone did move.

There was a flash of light before Dream opened his eyes to George holding Sapnap by the wrist and waist, pulling him away from what would have been a head injury at best and at worst...

Well, maybe not death, but there was no way of being completely certain of that.

George dragged Sapnap right to the edge of the bank, then released him on the floor with a thud.

He flinched and mouthed an apology, but Dream didn't think being dropped on the floor the slightest bit harsher than he would've preferred was Sapnap's biggest problem.

Sapnap blinked, staring at the sky with a face void of expression. He blinked, blinked, blinked, then turned to Dream. "Hey. What just happened?"

"You tripped," Dream said, breathless, "and now you have mud on you. Let's try to go back without tripping again."

Sapnap offered him a pity laugh before standing up with shaky legs. "Yeah. Let's just go."

Neither of them addressed the elephant in the room.

The trek back home was fast-paced yet silent. All the jubilation from the day had been sucked out. Neither Sapnap nor George made any attempt at eye contact or conversation with Dream. And to be fair, Dream didn't make any such attempt either. There were questions that needed to be addressed, but the static in Dream's mind drowned them out.

It was only when they got home someone broke the silence.

Dream looked up from his phone when Sapnap emerged from the bathroom wearing pajamas and damp hair.

"Hey," Sapnap called. "I need to ask you something. Nothing bad, it's just been on my mind."

"Go for it."

"Dream..." Sapnap chuckled and gave him a warm smile. "You can give it up now, you know. I know your roommate isn't human."

Reveal

Chapter Notes

tw: talks of death, spirituality

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There were no words Dream could use to counter the resolute firmness of Sapnap's voice or to describe the horror on every feature of George's face, so he laughed. There was nothing else he could've done.

Laugh. Just laugh. Laugh!

"I know what you're trying to do and it's not gonna work this time," Sapnap said. "You always turn these things into some sort of joke. I'm not falling for it."

Took one to know one. Sapnap did the exact same thing whenever Dream cornered him during an argument. Their past arguments seemed so petty in comparison now—which ice cream flavor is the best, cats versus dogs, which type of Minecraft wood was the best. All of those arguments paled in comparison to the confirmation that something beyond them and the mortal plane they knew existed.

God, he was so stupid. So, so stupid.

He couldn't stop laughing.

"Dream," George called, his voice quiet. "He already knows. I can tell."

"Stop laughing, Dream," Sapnap said. He took a seat on the other end of the couch and straightened his back in what Dream could only interpret was an attempt to look serious.

Stop, stop, Dream told himself, but laughter wouldn't stop bubbling out of his throat and pulling him underneath it. The panic from Sapnap almost slipping into the river, the guilt of having to ignore George for the majority of the day, the stress of keeping all of it under wraps—everything finally crashed down on him like a riptide. He was out of breath. Was he drowning? He felt like he was drowning.

"Dream, man," Sapnap said, scooting closer to him. His eyebrows were furrowed in concern, and he set a hand on Dream's shoulder. "Come on. Breathe. You've got this."

"I'm sorry," Dream managed to eke out. His throat felt scratchy. His body shook. Maybe it trembled? All he knew was the vague sense of panic slowly burning through every inch of him.

"God, I'm so sorry."

Then he made the mistake of locking eyes with George, and the laughter returned.

How funny. Dream had messed up enough to expose the entirety of George's world, yet George was the one concerned for him.

"Dream," George said. He sighed and moved to sit on the armrest next to Dream. "Just focus on us,

okay? Or just Sapnap or your cat or whatever you need to.” There was a moment of hesitation before George’s wing carefully, slowly wrapped around Dream’s back. The tip rested at his waist, and the slightest bit of the feathers tickled against the back of his neck.

It was soft. So, so soft.

Dream didn’t know how much time had passed before his breathing finally evened out. It felt like a second, but it could have been hours for all he knew.

The three sat in silence. It was only a few minutes into it that Dream realized they were waiting for him.

“How?” Dream asked.

“To be fair, you did a decent job at hiding it,” Sapnap said. “If I didn’t know you, I definitely would’ve known something shady was going on, but I don’t think I would’ve come to the conclusion that I did.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if you’d let me get out my list...”

“You made a list?” Dream said, laughing. Finally, the ball of tension inside his stomach began to unravel just the slightest bit.

Sapnap laughed along with him and pulled out his phone. “I wrote everything down in the notes app. But uh... really, I just thought it was kinda weird how you never introduced me to your roommate or even told me their name. I guess that’s the thing that tipped me off to the other weird shit going on around you. And you were talking to someone every night, too.”

“I can’t have a social life?”

“Okay, yeah, you can, but we don’t even call every day and we’re best friends. If you were calling your mom or family, you wouldn’t be hiding it from me. So who would you be talking to every day that late at night except a partner?” Sapnap paused to scroll down on the list. “Then remember when we stayed up late and I asked you if you had a partner? You said no, and that’s what tipped me off to something weirder going on. Besides, you don’t hide people from me.”

“Or do I?” Dream said with a raised eyebrow.

“No, you don’t, shut up.”

“Fine, okay.”

Then Sapnap listed off every single thing that tipped him off, from Dream becoming good at crane games when he had never expressed interest in a game that wasn’t Minecraft to Dream’s body jerking so suddenly when the apple was thrown at him as if he had been pushed. Objects dropped by either of them suddenly gained velocity or went an entirely different direction. There was no evidence of another person living at the apartment, but the way Dream acted implied there was, even after he claimed his roommate was somewhere else. And during moments of silence, there always seemed to be... *something* Dream looked directly at for a split second, even if there was nothing in front of them. They had to have been sitting there for another hour, just listening to Sapnap list off strange events.

“I still don’t know how you got guardian angel from that,” Dream said when it all finished.

“I never said I thought it was a guardian angel.” Sapnap chuckled upon hearing Dream curse underneath his breath. “It’s okay, I already knew. I thought it was just a ghost buddy you had with you until... you know, what happened today.”

Everyone fell silent.

“I’m just—I don’t know about religion, but...” He took a deep breath before laughing. “You know my family. I know I’ve told you the stories they told me as a kid before. Spirituality’s a weird little thing. Truth is—”

“You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”

“You just revealed you had an entire guardian angel. I think I could at least give you my thoughts free of charge.” Sapnap’s gaze moved up to his ceiling. “Truth is, you know that feeling you get—that moment when time stops—when you just instinctively know you’re about to die?”

Dream knew that all too well, even if he was protected from it now. He nodded.

“I know I was meant to die back there. Everything happened so suddenly. Even if you somehow got the reaction time to reach for me, I wasn’t going to take you down with me. I don’t remember what I was thinking in the moment, but I know I at least wanted that. So what else? Just a normal ghost wouldn’t have the strength or reaction time to save me. But a guardian angel? That’s a completely different story.”

“Don’t say that,” Dream said, his throat running dry. “You don’t know you would’ve died.”

Sapnap shook his head. “No, I was thinking about it on the way here, and there was only one possible outcome that could’ve come from that situation. Don’t try to deny fate. That’s stupid.”

“Yet you did.”

“Not intentionally. Or maybe being saved by your guardian angel was fate? I don’t know. I just...” He leaned back in his seat and crossed his arms. “I just owe a lot to your guardian angel. That’s all I know.”

“Damn right, you do,” George said with a smirk tugging at his lips.

Dream laughed. “You know what my guardian angel just said?”

“No, what?” Sapnap said. He wrinkled his nose when Dream repeated what George had said. “You know what, Mister Ghost Man? I take all of that back. How dare you let me live? Now I actually have to study and do school stuff.”

And with that, the heavy air around them was lifted as Dream relayed George’s words to Sapnap and Sapnap responded accordingly.

And finally, for the first time in hours, Dream finally cracked a real, warm smile.

Retiring early for the day seemed best for both of them. And even then, it was two in the morning before Dream managed to work up the courage to ask.

“Hey, George,” Dream called quietly, lying unmoving in under his blankets.

There was a familiar squeak of a chair. George must’ve turned the chair to face him. “What?”

“Why did you save Sapnap?”

George scoffed. “What do you mean?”

Dream sat up, blinking. Once the vague figure of George in the darkness focused into vision, he spoke again. “He has his own guardian angel, right? Why did you step in?”

Silence.

“George?”

“Where did you get that idea?” George said.

“I mean, when we first met, you said other people had guardian angels, too.”

“I remember saying that. I don’t remember saying everyone had one, or even the majority had one.”

“... What? Wait, did you lie to me or something then?”

There was a pause before George reached forward and flipped the blinds open, allowing moonlight to filter in. He scooted the chair closer to Dream and flicked the lamp on the nightstand on. His eyebrows were furrowed in concern. “Dream, I think we’re operating under different assumptions here. When did I say everyone had one?”

Dream squinted at the sudden light but silently thanked George for not just flicking on the entire bedroom light. “You didn’t say it, but you definitely implied it...”

“Okay, what did I say exactly?”

“Why would I remember that? That was months ago! Shouldn’t you remember?”

“And why would I remember?”

“I don’t know, you’re an angel. Don’t you have direct access to God or whoever the hell is up there?” Dream laughed at George’s dumbfounded expression. “Okay, sorry, I guess not that. But... does Sapnap seriously not have one?”

“No. Not in the slightest.”

“So a lot of people don’t have one either?”

George snorted and rolled his eyes. “How do you think people die, Dream? Or get into major accidents? It isn’t because a guardian angel was shitty at their job.”

“Then...” Dream frowned, wondering if he should even ask. Then his mouth did the job for him. “Why did you get turned into a guardian angel out of everyone? And why me? Why am I being protected?”

George hummed, then leaned back into the chair and whirled so he wasn’t facing Dream. His voice was heavy, tired. “It’s not like anyone ever told us, but I’ve spoken to a couple of other angels. There seems to be a few things in common between us. That’s all I can say.”

“Or what, your heaven corporate overlords are gonna kick you out of heaven?” Dream paused. His mind rewinded the memory of their first meeting. “Wait, you’re not gonna get in trouble because of me, are you? You mentioned something about being demoted—”

“No, I’m not,” George said with a smile in his voice. “Thanks for your concern, but there’s no clear set of guidelines for interacting with humans since, you know... I’m pretty much the only person who got booted down here. As long as you don’t tell half the population, I’m fine.”

“What happens if I do?”

“Not sure. I don’t think I want to find out either.”

Well, that was ominous. Maybe he should move on.

“You didn’t answer my other question,” Dream said. “Why me?”

George’s wing waved flippantly. “I don’t know the answer to everything, idiot. Why do you keep asking like I do? But...” The wing curled back in. “I will say I’m glad it was you. You know, out of everyone I could’ve been paired to. Now, goodnight.”

Dream reached out to turn off the lamp, then a smile sprang on his face and he chuckled. “Just say you love me George, it’ll make me sleep so much easier.”

“I hope you get no sleep.”

“Wouldn’t that make your job harder?”

“It’s worth it.”

And that would’ve been the end of the conversation if Dream hadn’t remembered.

“You didn’t answer my question, you know,” Dream said. “Why did you save Sapnap?”

A moment of silence followed before George scooted away from him and said, “No one deserves to lose their best friend like that, Dream. Not even someone as annoying as you.”

“Wow, thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Now, stop bothering me and go to sleep.”

“Can I say one last thing?”

“Fine.”

“I’m just glad I don’t have to ignore you anymore.” Dream laughed and pulled his blankets over him. “I’m really, really happy about that.”

George chuckled in response to that. “You’re so ridiculous. You never had to feel bad about it in the first place.”

There was nothing to say to that. So Dream shut his eyes and settled into the bed, a million questions floating around in his head but no words left to ask.

Dream woke up to two voices yelling at each other in the kitchen.

“Snipsnap, I swear if you burn the eggs again, I’m throwing this salt shaker at you.”

“Wow, okay, Mister Angel Man. First of all, my name is Sapnap. And aren’t you supposed to be super peaceful and nonviolent?”

“It’s not violence if it’s against you. And my name is George, idiot.”

“No way your name is actually George.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying for the past thirty minutes!”

Dream blinked when he walked into the kitchen. Was this scene real? His best friend and his guardian angel were really fighting in the kitchen at seven in the morning not even twenty-four hours after both of them knew of each others’ existence.

Both Sapnap and George fell silent, both their expressions sheepish when they spotted Dream.

“Guys,” Dream called, “what the *fuck*? ”

Sapnap spoke first. “Okay, first of all, you have to tell me this guy’s name.”

“His name is Idiot I’m Going To Murder Number Two If Neither Of You Tell Me Why You’re Up So Early. Just call him George.”

“Wow, long name. Wait, number two?”

“Okay, enough of that,” George said. “What happened was I woke up and dressed myself like a responsible human being—”

“You’re not even human.”

“Shut up, Snapmap. Anyway, I started cooking breakfast for everyone because, woah, I actually wanted to do something nice for once. Then this idiot comes barging in asking me who I am and what I’m doing in this house—”

“You never told me you were his guardian angel until, like, ten minutes ago!”

“Couldn’t you have guessed?”

Dream sighed and moved to flip the burning eggs over as the two continued arguing.

This was gonna be a long three days.

Chapter End Notes

processing near-death takes time. more time than a walk back home.

A Team

Chapter Notes

tw: thoughts about the events of chapter 6

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream had never felt like more of a mom in his life, and he had lived with two younger siblings.

“Dude, move!” Sapnap said, nudging George out of the way with a classic shoulder check. “I’m carrying two plates, idiot.”

George glared even though Sapnap’s back was turned to him. “And I’m carrying silverware, dumbass. You don’t want me to drop a fork right on your toe, do you?”

“For all you know, that’s exactly what I want.”

“Oh, really?”

“Guys, I was really clear about this,” Dream sighed. “Set the table *without* killing each other.”

The two fell silent, but the air between them was still stony.

Was this how his parents felt when he and his siblings were still young? Did his mother sigh this much when he pulled on his sister’s pigtails? Did his father get those wrinkles on his brow from having them furrowed every time Dream and his brother fought for a turn on the computer? He needed to apologize to his parents.

But after he dealt with this mess.

... It would be so much easier to just ignore it.

Dream picked up the spatula, then sighed as the two entered another argument.

It had been less than twenty-four hours after they had first officially met each other, and Dream was already used to their bullshit.

Setting George and Sapnap against each other in Hypixel duels in Minecraft in an attempt to keep them from murdering each other hadn’t worked, but admittedly, George’s screams whenever Sapnap killed him in-game made up for all the trouble Dream had went through the entire day.

"This is bullshit," George said, fumbling with the mouse. "I haven't played on this server in three years!"

"Still uses 1.8 mechanics, you boomer," was Sapnap's response as he smirked at the screen. He had a few hearts on George. "You're losing against ol' Sappy Nappy's laptop play. How do you feel

about that?"

"I'm only losing because of Dream's stupid username and e-boy skin."

Dream glared up at George from his phone. "Hey, DreamonPVP was an awesome name for a preteen to come up with. And I'm gonna change it soon, so stop judging me."

God, he had a fifty-four winstreak in dueling, last time he checked. He couldn't remember if choosing to duel a certain person counted against his winstreak. All he could do was hope letting George use his account (after his had been terminated by a friend? Did Mojang do those kinds of services for the deceased?) wasn't an awful decision. But judging by how George (on Dream's computer) was losing against Sapnap (who used Dream's bed as a mousepad and used a crappy, crusty laptop), it was probably one of the worst decisions he's ever made.

"George, more like... wait," Sapnap said, his brows furrowed. "Wait, no."

Dream clicked his phone off, then set his sights on Sapnap's screen.

Sapnap gasped when an arrow went flying past him. By the time he had gathered his bearings, George was closing in on him with a sword. "I got too cocky," he said, swinging back as he walked backwards. He slammed his mouse on the bed when the victor of the duel was announced as George. "I got too cocky!"

"Yes!" The grin that had sprouted on George's lips as he cheered was bright, radiant, sunny. The air around him seemed to glow just a bit from the sheer joy shown in that smile.

Heavenly. That was the only word Dream could use to describe that smile.

Sapnap had shut his laptop by the time Dream realized his heart still needed to beat. "Man, I'm going to bed. I hate all of you."

"Love you, too, Sappitus," Dream said. "Get some rest for once. You still need energy if you really wanna go to the amusement park tomorrow."

"It should be me saying that to you."

Their goodbye, though not obvious, was simple enough. But on the other side of the trio, it was blindingly obvious George had lost his grasp on friendship.

George offered Sapnap a small, almost timid wave and the tiniest smile. "Goodnight, I guess."

Thankfully, *thankfully*, Sapnap had the sense to give him an encouraging smile back. "Thanks, dude. Goodnight to you, too." With that, he left the room with his laptop and mouse in tow, shutting the door behind him.

"Turn around right now," George said.

Dream averted his gaze, and when he turned back, George's wings and uniform (Was it a uniform? Not like Dream could confirm with other angels) from heaven had returned. His human clothes were stacked neatly on the floor.

George stretched out his wings, then fell back against the chair. "I don't understand how you people do it. Isn't it tiring hauling around a flesh bag with you everywhere you go?"

"I'm pretty sure you had to do that, like, every day just a couple years ago," Dream said.

"Yeah, but it feels different now." George lied on his side, his wings falling around him like a blanket. "Whatever. My accomplishment of the day is beating the hell out of Sapnap, and that's fine with me."

"I mean, you lost five rounds against him before—"

"Shut up. Let me have this."

Dream fell silent, scrolling through emails from work, tweets raving about the new Minecraft update, texts from his family group chat—

Was... Was that snoring?

Dream set his phone down.

George was balled up in the chair, loosely hugging his knees to his chest as his wings curled gently around him. His eyes were fluttered shut and his mouth agape just the slightest bit. He had never looked more peaceful and exhausted.

It was prime blackmail material.

Dream opened the camera app on his phone and snapped a picture. He'd have to show it to George when he woke up. George's expression was visible in the picture, right? Dream zoomed in.

Huh. George was awfully pretty for a boy.

And now he just felt like a creep. Great. Nice going, Dream. He should probably stop looking.

Dream sent a quick goodnight text to the family group chat before shutting his phone off and plugging it into the charger on his nightstand.

... Fuck, he still had to turn the lights off.

He stood up and walked towards the lightswitch, but his gaze drifted back to George as soon as his finger hovered over the switch.

"Goodnight, George," Dream said quietly. He flicked the light off, then returned to bed.

"Delete that or I'll delete you."

"You'll delete me? You and what height?"

"How're you doing, Patches?" Sapnap cooed as Dream held his phone above his head and George reached up to no avail. Even after George tackled Dream to the ground and snatched the phone away, Sapnap hummed as he scratched beneath Patches's chin.

Maybe Dream had underestimated the Florida heat for all his life.

“Oh my god, how do you people deal with this?” George said, wiping the sweat off his forehead with a hand. In his other hand, he held a cool water bottle (that Dream had spent a good two dollars on, but it wasn’t like George truly understood American currency, otherwise Dream wasn’t sure he would’ve let him buy it) to his neck.

Sapnap laughed. “It’s only eighty degrees, George. It’s hot, but it’s not *that* hot.”

“‘ *It’s only eighty degrees, George* ,’” George repeated in a nasally voice. “I hate you and your temperature superiority complex. Where are you from, Yeehaw Central?”

“It’s called the United Counties of Yeehaw, idiot, get it right.”

“Guys, we’re at the front of the line,” Dream said. “At least wait until we get in the teacups to bully each other.”

And they did, surprisingly. But Dream didn’t feel like being kicked out of the amusement park thirty minutes after they got there, so he settled in between Sapnap and George when they entered the teacup.

“Well, at least we’re in your domain now, George,” Sapnap said, shutting the door to the teacup behind him. “At least, I think so.”

George rolled his eyes and mumbled, “I don’t even like tea that much.” He set his hands on the turntable in front of them. “Anyway, what’re we supposed to do here? Spin it around and make ourselves look like idiots?”

Dream hummed and placed his hands on edge of the turntable, ignoring Sapnap’s quip saying George already did a good job of that himself. “Basically, yeah.” He frowned despite the giddy anticipation building in his stomach. “Dude, these rides are not for three grown men. Look at this shitty leg room.”

Even with that distraction, Sapnap crossed his arms and sent Dream a knowing look. He knew him too well to miss the mischief inbound.

But George certainly didn’t.

The music advanced as George began complaining about the leg room. Dream gripped the turntable and pushed. Then pushed again. And another time, and another and another —

“Dream!” George and Sapnap shrieked.

Dream threw his head back and cackled as he spun the teacup around and around, the wind tossing his hair whichever way the teacup spun. Air rushed past his face, a relief from the spring heat but a reminder of how absurdly fast they were going. He vaguely registered screams from other people around him.

Free! They were free! The park was a blur around them, and the winds blew by so hard it felt as if a tornado were passing by.

Then George’s arms shot out and wrapped around Dream’s waist as if his life depended on it, trapping Dream’s left arm in the process.

Still, Dream relinquished control over his arm and spun with his right hand. He laughed despite the possible hearing loss he would experience in a moment. “George, stop screaming in my ear!”

“Then you stop spinning so damn fast!” George said back, now planting his forehead on Dream’s shoulder with his eyes screwed shut.

Eh, he had had his fun. His arms were getting tired anyway.

Dream took his hand off the turntable and placed it gently on George’s shoulder, pulling him just the tiniest bit closer. George leaned into the touch.

Sapnap continued spinning the teacup at a more reasonable speed but fast enough for Dream to get some fun out of it. Once the teacup picked up enough speed, he threw his arms in the air and cheered.

Dream cheered along, his grin becoming just a bit brighter when George carefully looked up at their surroundings and smiled.

Maybe going on a rollercoaster with Sapnap wasn’t the brightest idea. But then again, Sapnap probably thought the same about Dream. George had been lucky enough to sit out the rollercoaster ride, saying he was tired and just wanted to nap in the car.

“This rollercoaster is awfully rickety, don’t you think?” Dream said as the two ascended.

Sapnap snorted, annoyance flickering in his eyes. “You always do this, Dream. You *always* do this. It never works either.”

“Oh, yeah? Is that why you’re holding onto the bars so tightly?”

“You hate rollercoasters more than I do.”

That was true. Dream could ignore his clammy hands and racing heart all he wanted, but the pit of fear burrowing into his stomach as the rollercoaster ascended to the highest peak. Chains rattled beneath them, and the rollercoaster was indeed rickety. As much as Dream knew that was by design and wasn’t actually a fault of the machine, there was one illogical part of his brain that wanted to jump off before the rollercoaster even had a chance to break apart.

A flash of concern flashed by Sapnap’s face before he smirked then set his hand on top of Dream’s. “Socks off, coward.”

That was just enough of a distraction for Dream to miss the instant the rollercoaster tipped over the edge, but not enough that he couldn’t register the wind blowing past his face and the way his stomach lurched with the rollercoaster’s turns.

This was a mistake. This was such a—

“Why the hell would you go on a rollercoaster if you don’t like them?”

“Well, when you say it like *that* ...”

Dream answered George’s glare with an uncertain shrug and smile.

“I’m more surprised Dream lived through the entire thing,” Sapnap said, reclining his seat. He chuckled when George kicked the back of his seat. “You’re the clumsiest person I know.”

George huffed and scooted over to behind the driver’s seat. “For the record, the only way you could mess up on an otherwise functional rollercoaster is to act like a dumbass. It’s easier to be a dumbass when you’re just out and walking about.”

“Should we even be trusting him to drive? It’s raining, too.”

“With the alternative being you? I’ll take my chances.”

Dream shook his head when Sapnap turned to glare. “Should’ve seen that one coming, Sapnap. Can I leave the parking garage now?”

“You’re the one driving, idiot,” George scoffed.

“Okay, but you’re the one who insisted on waiting until everyone was gone so we could ‘minimize car accidents’ or some stupid shit like that.”

“How is that stupid?”

Sapnap groaned. “Oh my god, just drive.”

The way out was rife with arguments, screams, and gasps every time they passed a speed bump, but Dream wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Why does it always have to rain in Florida?” Sapnap said, his eyebrows furrowed as he watched out the window with a cup of hot chocolate in hand.

George was curled up on the side of the couch closest to the window. He rolled his eyes. “Why’re you drinking hot chocolate in the middle of spring?”

“Hot chocolate is always in season.”

“You’re one of those people who eat waffles at three in the morning, aren’t you?”

Sapnap pursed his lips and crossed his arms defensively. “... So what?”

Dream tuned out their squabbling and peered out the window.

Dream’s apartment wasn’t too particularly high up. He could still see rain pattering down on the streets, the streetlamps doing their damned best to light up whatever they could (which wasn’t very much, but Dream appreciated their effort). The rhythm of the rain was lulling, soothing. Even though it wasn’t pouring, only a couple people equipped with umbrellas were outside. Soon, nobody was left.

Somewhere between Dream noting how cold the window was and the last person escaping the rain, the room had fallen silent, the three of them listening to the song of raindrops.

Dream tapped on the window.

Sapnap scratched at the patchy mustache growing back above his lips.

George shifted his weight to the other side of the couch.

It was a while before anyone broke the silence.

“Sorry about the rain,” Dream said. “I wish we could’ve stayed at the park longer.”

Sapnap shrugged. “Rain isn’t anything bad. Good luck with the humidity tomorrow though, it’s gonna be miserable.”

“It may be miserable tomorrow, but Texas is always miserable.”

“You take that back.”

Dream opened his mouth to respond, but the sound of the window being pulled open was unmistakable.

“George!” Dream and Sapnap shouted.

Sometime during their conversation, George had kneeled down next to the window and propped it open. He held his palms out of the window, allowing the rain to drop against his skin and... the carpeted floor?

Hell no.

Dream ran to the bathroom and returned with an armful of towels. He laid them out next to where George kneeled. Water damage was real. No way was he about to be yelled at by his landlord right after one of the best weeks of his life.

Sapnap, though he helped lay out some of the towels, was much less frantic. He hummed to himself as he smoothed out the wrinkles in the towels on the floor, then said, “I don’t know how long ago you died. When’s the last time you felt the rain?”

That was... not the best way to ask that implied question.

“It was raining on the day I died, and my stupid friend forgot an umbrella even after I told him to bring one, so we got rained on a lot,” George said. He didn’t even blink at that question, didn’t shy away from it like last time all those months ago.

Dream admired that.

“I died three years ago, so last time I felt rain was three years ago.” He flipped his hands over, allowing the rain to fall on the back of his hands. “I guess I kind of missed it.”

The rainfall continued, as did the silence.

Huh. George’s hands drooped out of the window. His head was down and eyes closed. Was he asleep? He was definitely asleep.

And Sapnap... stayed far away from the rain. Dream didn’t blame him.

The mood was far too somber for him.

Dream stepped forward and held his own cupped hand out, waiting for it to fill up with water before he splashed it on George's face.

George jolted awake, only to find Dream and Sapnap laughing at a volume that would certainly earn a noise complaint. "Dream!"

"That was Sapnap," Dream said through a wheeze.

Sapnap raised his palms in the universal "what the fuck?" hand gesture. "What? I'm literally all the way over here!"

"Yup, definitely you."

And now Dream had two people glaring at him, but he had two handfuls of water ready to throw and towels on the floor ready to soak up any evidence of the war he was about to start.

"Your hair looks stupid when it's wet," George snickered as Dream tossed a wet towel into his laundry basket.

Dream rolled his eyes, ignoring his outrageously spiked hair in the mirror and the way Patches kept its distance away from him. "Shut up."

Rain. One droplet could spiral into something completely different.

"You okay, Dream?" George said. "You've been staring at the mirror for longer than usual. Vain bastard."

Dream turned away from the mirror.

Why was Dream the only person who had to still be awake? Sure, it was two in the morning, but that didn't give George or Sapnap the right to leave him alone with his thoughts like this.

And the center of his current thoughts slept in the chair next to him.

There wasn't a lot Dream knew about George's past life, the circumstances of his death, or the people he knew back then. That was fair; he wasn't too keen on making the one person he had to spend every second of his life around uncomfortable with too many questions. Though he would be lying if he said he wasn't curious.

Dream's gaze fell on George.

It had been raining on the day George died. Did the heavens mourn with the knowledge of the duty he would later take on? Was there light, gentle rain or a heavy storm of lightning, angry at having such a young, undeserving soul ripped away from the world, angry at the unfairness of it all? Had the friend with him mourned with the skies that day?

Sapnap. The air had been heavy that day, practically drenched from the rain that had fallen down recently. The river was frantic, vengeful, angry. And Sapnap, his best friend, the person he grew up with, the person he couldn't imagine life without, he, he—

Dream didn't want to think about that.

Maybe that was why George had acted so quickly. Had it been a familiar experience?

Dream wouldn't ask. If fate hadn't been interfered with on that day, he wouldn't want anyone to ask either.

But he was thankful. God, if he wasn't thankful.

"Thank you," Dream mumbled into his pillow.

No response. He didn't know why he expected one.

Saying goodbye was always the hardest part.

"Thanks for letting me crash here like a bum for the week," Sapnap said, embarrassment tinging his voice. His suitcase was packed and stood by the door, and the bag he carried was lined with snacks Dream had insisted he take with him. He laughed and covered the back of his neck with a hand. "I'll pay you back for all of this when you least expect it."

Dream snorted and tossed him another granola bar. "As if you could slip anything past me. Remember when you tried to glitter bomb me a couple years ago? The company name was literally on the envelope."

George tutted and shook his head, ignoring Sapnap's defenses. "I knew you were stupid but not *that* stupid."

"Oh, fuck you," Sapnap said. "I'll fight you right now."

"I'd like to see you try, Snappity Nappity."

Sapnap stepped forward, only to put his arm on George's shoulders and hold him in a loose, half-assed headlock. He grinned as he ruffled his hair. "Nice meeting you, Mister Angel. I still don't really think your name is George, but keep my stupid friend alive, will you?"

George clicked his tongue in annoyance, but the smile on his face said otherwise. "It's a hard job, I'll tell you that. And my name is George. What else would it be?"

"I don't know, I thought it'd be something grander like Lucifer."

"Sapnap, you idiot," Dream wheezed out upon seeing George's brows furrow into a glare. "Lucifer is literally Satan."

Sapnap shrugged. "You think I don't know?"

George huffed at that and pushed him away. "Wow, okay. I hate you, too. See you in hell."

“See ya.”

Even as Dream laughed with them, he knew this conversation was really just delaying the inevitable. That was obvious to all three of them, wasn't it?

Finally, when the laughter faded away, Sapnap turned to Dream with his arms out. “Why do you look so sad? Come here, you idiot.”

Dream fell into the hug, and after a brief session of the two trying to assert who was the stronger hugger, they relaxed into each others' hold.

He didn't want to let go. Not after everything that had happened.

“Really, thanks for everything,” Sapnap murmured. “Best week of my life. Love you, man.”

Even with everything that had happened. Even after the chaotic disaster this week was.

Dream's hold on him tightened. “Love you, too.”

Dream had run out of words; he had used up all of them trying to come up with what to say the night before. But he supposed the benefit of being friends for so long was that words weren't necessary.

They knew. They both knew.

“George, you look like such a fucking idiot just standing there,” Sapnap said, snickering. He took one arm off Dream and held it out. “Just get in, you're basically like my little brother.”

The expression on George's face looked much too offended for someone who had just been offered entry into a group hug. “Um, if anything, *you'd* be the little—”

“For fuck's sake, George,” Dream sighed before he pulled George into the hug.

Once George relaxed into the hug, they stayed in contemplative silence.

And for once in this timeline of his existence, everything felt right with the world.

The apartment had never felt so hollow before.

Dream sat on the couch, taking in his surroundings. Sapnap's suitcase was gone, a free space where his charger had been plugged in, no white headband resting on the table for Patches to play with. But frankly, he preferred this over having those items still here with no owner.

Rushing water. Slippery mud.

“It's okay, you know,” came George's voice.

Dream froze. When had George taken a seat next to him?

George sipped juice from a mug, his right wing extending behind Dream's back. The tip stopped at the front of Dream's shoulder. There was a certain understanding in his tone Dream couldn't quite

place.

“What?” Dream said.

“If you want to cry, go ahead. I won’t comment on it later.”

A hot pressure built up behind his eyes, threatening to burst through the dam he had worked so hard to maintain. When was the last time he had cried?

“How did you know?” Dream said. He winced at the crack in his voice, but no amount of regret could take that back.

George responded by moving his wing closer to Dream’s back, just close enough he could feel the feathers against his neck but not close enough to be able to feel the texture of it. But that was all Dream needed.

Rushing water. Slippery mud. Another chance at life.

Finally, *finally* , the dam burst into a million pieces.

Dream sobbed into his hands, the warmth around his back blocking out the world’s judgement.

Chapter End Notes

about the rollercoaster scene: sapnap's goal in saying socks off was to distract dream from the anticipation of the rollercoaster reaching its peak.

thanks for reading! ^_^

Something New

Chapter Notes

lovely fanart of chapter 5 by Vic!!! also linked in chapter 5 but linked in the newest update (here) bc its beautiful and i need everyone to see it:
<https://dontrollthedicesideblog.tumblr.com/post/621782706874875904/i-think-this-is-how-tumblr-works-never-used-it>

Sapnap sent 36 attachments

Sapnap: figured you might want this

Dream: you figured correctly

Dream: thank you

Sapnap: np dude

Sapnap: and tell george hes a stinky poopoo head

Sapnap: youre one too, just to a lesser extent

Dream: no u

“Hey, George,” Dream called as he waited for the bacon on the pan to cook. George was seated on the counter next to him, idly picking at his nails. “Sapnap says you’re a stinky poopoo head.”

George rolled his eyes, then they widened before he pulled Dream to the side right as hot grease popped off the pan. “Dream!”

Dream chuckled, his heart warming at the disproportionate amount of concern in his shout. “It’s just a little bacon grease, George.”

George only groaned and crossed his arms. “Whatever. Tell him he’s a stinkier poopoo head.”

Dream: he says youre a stinkier poopoo head

Sapnap: WHAT

Sapnap: be there in 5 minutes to kick both of your asses be ready to catch these hands

Dream relayed the text to George, both laughing.

Nothing much had changed, it seemed. Dream was thankful for that much.

Office politics sucked for people who took days off. It sucked even more for people who took multiple days off.

Dream rolled his eyes as he deleted another passive-aggressive email from somebody on his team. He would just claim the email hadn’t arrived, as he would for the other four people who sent him similarly passive-aggressive emails. It’s not like any of this came as a surprise anyway; He had never been on the receiving end of it since he had never missed out on any days before, but he had

witnessed it from afar enough times to know the drill.

“Today’s workplace atmosphere is... interesting,” George said, his voice detached as he inspected his fingernails. “Don’t worry about it. Ignore them like you always did.”

Dream stilled, then pulled up the designated word document and typed. *You didn’t even read the emails. How did you know?*

George snorted. “Dream, you look like you’re gonna strangle someone right now. You always look like this at work.”

Wow, thanks.

“It’s not an insult, it’s a concern. I can’t protect you from your own body sabotaging itself.”

Dream paused. *What do you mean by that?*

“I’ve been watching over you for a couple of months now, you know. Every time you go to work, your coworkers make it hell for you,” George huffed. “It’s quite frustrating to watch, actually.”

Aw, you care about me <3

George raised an eyebrow. “Why would I not?”

Oh. He said that so casually as if Dream hadn’t just been trying to tease him. But it felt nice having their friendship validated so nonchalantly with no hesitation. It was... nice. Really nice, actually.

“I can see you smiling, you idiot,” George chuckled. When Dream hazarded a glance back, George’s lips were curled up into an amused smile. “Get back to work. Or, you know, keep looking at picture frames on Amazon. You scrolled past a pretty good deal earlier today.”

You’re such a bad influence.

“They’re your actions, not mine. I don’t have to worry about consequences.”

Bold of you to assume I care about consequences.

George shook his head, and Dream continued scrolling through deals on picture frames.

But he had missed a few days. He should probably catch up on his work and more.

Dream exited out of the website and opened the tab containing a work email, ignoring the pair of eyes burning into his back.

“Back to coding right after work?” George scoffed and flopped down on Dream’s bed. “Nerd.”

Dream shrugged. “It’s a grind.”

“You weren’t doing this before.”

That was true. But then again, he hadn’t ever seen the fragility of life before and how quickly everything he knew could be swept away.

Dream figured that was more of a drunken late-night Saturday discussion than a Monday afternoon discussion, so he hummed in response and turned up the music playing on his computer.

George sighed. "Dream, you're gonna get a noise complaint about that. Could you at least switch to a song that doesn't say 'I wanna see some ass' every two seconds?"

Dream only cackled in response.

Different day, same bullshit.

I hate everyone, Dream typed into a document. He waited for George to look up from whatever obscure previous assignments he had spread out on Dream's desk to read.

Thankfully, George had glanced up almost immediately and read the message on the document. He frowned. "Oh. What happened?"

Higher-ups reprimanded me for making a client's website less ugly. Told me to just follow instructions next time.

"Dream, I hate to say it, but that's standard procedure in a corporate setting. I did the same thing, except I did it one too many times and got sacked." He laughed when Dream's shoulders tensed. "Don't worry about it, that was more than a couple years ago. It turned out for the best, too."

Ah, right. George had told him he was a freelance programmer when he was alive. And Dream had wondered if...

It was still as null of a possibility as it was before. But something had changed—something within *him*. While he didn't particularly enjoy working where he did, it paid well and was relatively stable. Nothing about his workplace had changed, so why was everything so intensely grating now?

Well, he had bigger things to worry about now. He heard his boss in the distance asking his coworkers about progress.

Dream scooped up the papers spread out over his desk and stacked them neatly before deleting the word document and opening his coding program.

George pouted but leaned back against the wall as far as he could in preparation for another person entering the cubicle.

Eleven o'clock. Dream had gotten home half an hour past five, hopped onto his computer, and started typing away into Eclipse with nothing but a vision. Had he been coding for a straight five and a half hours?

Dream shut his eyes and scooted away from the desk, giving his legs enough room to stretch as he stretched his arms above his head. Relief.

Once the high from stretching after sitting in the same position for several hours faded, he opened his eyes and reached for his mouse.

Huh.

When had a plate of sliced fruit ever been on his desk?

Normally, there was nobody to watch him transform into a gremlin later in the night. He ate apples by biting into them, bananas straight out of the peel, strawberries with the green tops still on. There hasn't been a single time in his life he actually expended the effort of slicing fruit since he had moved out. Even if he had sliced it for himself, he doubted getting up to cut up fruit was something that could slip from his memory without a trace.

So who?

God, he was oblivious. Obvious answer would probably be the man sprawled over the bed with a book on SEO in hand. When had Dream bought that again?

"Hey," Dream called.

"You dog-ear the pages. You're dead to me."

"I was gonna thank you for the fruit, but okay. But really, thanks."

George hummed and turned a page. "No problem. You skipped dinner, so I wasn't sure if you were super focused or just not hungry. Fed the cat while I was at it."

Dream blinked. So he had.

"I didn't know you had so many books on stuff like this either. SEO, YouTube algorithm, algorithms in general. I remember reading some of these in my university classes. Great books. Boring, but informative." Then George frowned and turned another page. "I understand the SEO and algorithm books, but what's up with the YouTube ones? I don't think they'd be relevant to a platform that isn't..."

George gasped. That was never a good sign.

"Sapnap told me!" George said, sitting up with wide eyes. "Well, he didn't *tell me*, but he said something about you wanting to be a YouTuber, right? I can't have just imagined that."

Sapnap. Fucking Sapnap.

"Well, it's not like it matters," Dream said with a shrug. "I'm never gonna be a YouTuber, so..."

George leveled an annoyed look at him. "Dream, you can't be serious."

"*'Dream, you can't be serious,'*" Dream repeated in a mocking, nasally voice. "I'm serious."

"Have you even tried?"

"Yeah, when I was... thirteen? Fourteen?"

"And you're twenty now. I don't see what the problem is here."

Dream sighed.

There were a lot of problems, actually. He had studied the YouTube algorithm and how to make videos more clickable, that much was true. But actually executing his plans? He wasn't ready. It wasn't the right time. Not yet.

"Don't worry about it," Dream said, saving his work before shutting his computer off.

George gave him one last questioning glance before picking up the book and flipping the page.

"Used to write a lot."

George looked up from the book in his lap from where he was curled up on one side of the couch. In between him and Dream, Patches had dozed off in the middle seat. The lighting was dim and the blinds closed, the only source of light being the lights from the kitchen that neither had bothered to shut off from dinner. The night was silent.

"You did?" George asked.

Dream nodded, then froze. Maybe saying that out of nowhere at midnight was a bad idea. Where did that come from anyway? He had been sifting through his plug-in for errors, not anything even remotely related to literature, yet he had somehow found his way to the series of files containing writing he hadn't looked back on in over three years.

"Did you like writing?"

That was an understatement of a question. He couldn't recall the sheer number of times he had forwent homework to write the next chapter of the new story idea of the week, how many late nights he had spent fiddling with the exact wording of a passage. He picked up new vocabulary from his classes and weaved them into his own writing, tinkering with the sentence until it fit perfectly. It was funny how such a small thing brought him so much joy.

"I guess I did," Dream said. "A lot more than I thought I did."

"So why did you stop?" George, who had returned his gaze to the text of the book in his hands, continued speaking. "I mean, your job doesn't give you very much work to do outside of office hours. You've only started to *really* grind coding plug-ins after Sapnap left, so that should've left you plenty of time to work on things like that."

God.

Dream's fingers stopped, hovering above the keyboard of the laptop in his lap. Everything clicked into place.

Why did he have to say that?

George's gaze moved back up to Dream, and he frowned. "Dream. You okay?"

Dream gave him a dismissive wave. "Yeah, I'm fine. It just made me realize something."

Why had he stopped writing? Because his interests had drifted from the written word to coding. That was simple enough to answer.

But he had started grinding after Sapnap had left, more than he ever had in his life. A certain fear fueled every key he tapped, every line he read about search engines, every run he tested of his code. The fear had always been present, but everything that had happened poured more gasoline into the fire.

God, Sapnap hadn't even finished one year of college yet. Nineteen years were barely enough to do anything, and Dream was only one year older than him.

Dream could die at any time. So could everyone else in his life. He at least wanted to say he did everything he could before he died.

Still, making Minecraft plug-ins alone in his room wasn't his full potential. Having his creativity stifled by a corporate structure was the bare minimum he could reach. Even if his coworkers were content with the stability that gave, shutting his brain off for eight hours a day while not being valued by the people around him wasn't something he could tolerate for much more. That was what he became painfully aware of over the past couple of days.

Even so, there was a mental block he had struggled with for years. He needed to find the right time, but nothing ever felt like the right time.

How much of that was Dream willing to tell? Vulnerability was scary, but trusting someone with such a visceral, human fear was even scarier.

"Hey, can I ask something?" Dream said, careful to keep his tone nonchalant.

George chuckled with a shrug. "You didn't answer my question, but okay."

"Do you ever... I don't know, feel like you didn't do enough but can't get yourself to do what you want to do?"

George stilled, and Dream regretted every decision that led him to that moment. Why had he asked that? George died young! That was such a stupid question, and now the smile on George's face was gone. God, he was such an idiot.

"I suppose so, yes," George finally said slowly, as if he were choosing his words carefully. "Why do you ask?"

Dream fell silent. All his courage had evaporated.

George sighed. "Okay, bullshit. I know exactly why you asked, and I'd be damned if I'm letting you go down the same road I did."

"The same road?"

His question went ignored. Fucking hypocrite. George shut the book and set it down on the table, focusing all his attention on Dream. "You have nothing to lose, Dream. Absolutely nothing."

"My pride."

"That's worth less than you think it is. Your sense of accomplishment is worth a lot more than whatever ego you want to maintain." George's eyebrows furrowed, and he frowned. "What is this in context of? What do you feel like you can't do? Publish a book?"

Dream frowned with him, avoiding eye contact. Eye contact was too vulnerable. "No, not that. Maybe in the future, but that's not what my main focus is on."

“Then your plug-ins?”

“Kind of.”

“Minecraft as a whole?”

“What does that even mean?”

“Your YouTube channel.” George rolled his eyes. “God, Dream, I’m not stupid. I wanted to give you a chance to say it out loud yourself, but I guess not. And I still stand by what I said. You have nothing to lose.”

Well, he supposed it had been obvious enough. But that wasn’t the full picture.

“That, but there’s something else, too,” Dream said.

George leveled a blank stare at him.

Dream shook his head. “Yeah, fine, I get it. But... you know how much I hate my job.”

“So are you saying you want to freelance?”

“Essentially, yeah.”

George huffed and leaned forward, locking eyes with Dream whether he wanted to or not. There was something ominous in his gaze, something Dream couldn’t quite place but felt uncomfortable looking away from. Or maybe Dream was just shitty at eye contact. Could go either way. “Quite frankly, I’m surprised you haven’t ditched your job for freelancing already. You’re a very creative person, Dream. You don’t do well working under other people.”

Huh. That was accurate.

Dream blinked, and finally managed to tear his gaze away from George’s. “I guess you’re right. But freelancing takes a lot of time. I would have to quit my job or—”

“No! No.” George said, reaching forward and waking up Patches with the sudden movement. He gave Patches an apologetic look, then glanced back up to Dream. “Don’t quit your day job. Seriously. Not until you have a good client base. You don’t have to choose either. It’s not something you have to devote all your time to.”

Dream had to laugh at that. He offered him a smile in the face of all the solemnness this night had provided. “I know, don’t worry. I’m not gonna do something stupid like that. I’m just...”

The block was still as present as ever, but George was right. He had nothing but his pride to lose, and he wasn’t doing much with his time anyway.

“I’m not really ready,” Dream finished.

George raised an eyebrow. “Then when will you be?”

There was no way of answering that. But testing the waters couldn’t hurt, could it?

Dream picked up his phone, unlocked it, and tapped on a conversation with a contact.

Dream: hey Sapnap

Dream: make a youtube channel with me

“Why the hell should I make a YouTube channel with you?”

Dream turned away upon seeing George shoo him away from the doorframe to his bedroom. There was no limit to what George and Sapnap would do to annoy each other. “Sapnap, just do it.”

“Um, no. I’m literally in college. It’s my second semester, and I’m already kind of dying inside. Adding a YouTube channel to that isn’t a good idea.”

It was seven in the morning when Sapnap had called Dream a whopping thirty-seven times, Dream only waking up when George unplugged his phone and threw it on top of him without warning. Granted, George had also saved him when his head had stayed under the blankets for a bit too long, but that was besides the point.

“Just because you have a channel doesn’t mean you have to post to it,” Dream said.

“Why else would I have a channel? Hold on, let me put on a new shirt.” There was rustling on the other end before Sapnap spoke again. “Did you have to talk to me about this today? I have an eight AM class.”

“You’re the one who called me thirty-seven times!”

“And you’re the one who texted me last night about it. So who’s really the most annoying?”

Dream sighed.

Sapnap paused for an answer but spoke again upon realizing he won’t get one. “Trick question, the answer is George.”

“Wow, what a thing to hear from someone named Simpnap,” George said, walking forward to stand by Dream’s side. He set his elbow on Dream’s shoulder, but the elbow felt awfully... real. Had he taken on his human form just to annoy Sapnap?

“You’re the simp here, not me,” Sapnap said. “I’m not the one jumping to save Dream every two seconds. You’re more of a simp than Mario is for Peach.”

“How could you disrespect Mario like that?”

Dream rolled his eyes in spite of the smile on his face. “Yeah, yeah, enough of that. Sapnap, make a channel with me. No posting, no commitment. Consider it pay for staying at my place for a week. I already PayPal’d you the money you tried sending to me. Did you think I wouldn’t notice?”

“Yeah, I just thought it was so obvious you wouldn’t think anything of it,” Sapnap said, a hint of embarrassment in his voice.

“Idiot,” George scoffed before moving behind Dream. When he stepped back into Dream’s field of view, he had reverted back into his guardian angel form.

“I didn’t call you to get bullied by George.”

“Not my fault you didn’t read the fine print.” Dream smiled down at Patches, who had bumped its

head into his leg and purred. “Just make it, okay?”

Sapnap sighed. “I mean... fine. Whatever. What do you want me to name it?”

“Why’re you asking me? Name it whatever you want.”

“You sprung this on me out of nowhere.”

“Well, I’m naming mine Dream.”

“Very creative, I see.”

“I don’t see you coming up with a name.”

Sapnap paused, and the familiar sound of someone hauling a backpack up played over the phone speaker. “Well, I don’t know what you’re gonna do for another hour, but I have to get to class. I’ll link you to my channel when I make it, okay?”

“Alright, have fun.”

“Thanks. See you.” With that, Sapnap ended the call.

Dream shut off his phone, then turned his head towards George, who was chewing on a slice of bread. “What do you think Sapnap’s gonna name his channel?”

George shrugged. “I don’t know. Probably something stupid. Right?”

“I mean... yeah. Probably.”

George was partially right, if Sapnap counted as a stupid name for a channel. And according to George, it did.

“The idiot called his channel *Sapnap*. What even is that? What’s a Sapnap?” George said, pacing around Dream’s office. “That’s so stupid! What the hell?”

Dream bit into his arm to stifle the laughter that threatened to spill out. With his other hand, he managed to type out a message letter-by-letter. *George, please, I’m at work.*

Thankfully, George had stopped pacing long enough to read what he had typed on the document. “It’s true though. Even my YouTube username was better than that.”

Dream’s laughter stopped. *Wait, you had a channel???*

George stopped.

The silent laughter began again, and Dream wrote out another message. *Oh my god, you had a channel. What did you name yours?*

“That’s not important.”

Geoooooorge.

“Not important!”

Even as George pointedly ignored any other message Dream typed into the document, Dream’s heart felt lighter, so, so much lighter. Even just the knowledge that he had a channel, that Sapnap had a channel—that was liberating. When was the last time he had felt this free at work?

The answer to that didn’t matter. What did matter was the bright smile that sprang on George’s face when he thought Dream had returned to work.

That was worth more than anything.

You in my Life

"What're you doing?"

Dream snapped his head up, only to see George staring at him with a raised eyebrow and crossed arms. Admittedly, sitting at the kitchen table with pictures scattered everywhere like he was conducting a ritual was a bad look. The lit candle in the middle of the table (which he somehow hadn't burnt himself on) probably didn't help. Neither did the dim lighting everywhere else in the apartment. In fact, nothing around him was a good sign.

"Don't worry about it," Dream said.

That apparently wasn't the correct answer, because the perplexed expression on George's face didn't fade.

"... Interesting," George said, taking a seat across from him. He picked up one of the pictures. "Oh, are these the photos Sapnap sent? You could've just told me instead of being all cryptic about it."

"Where's the fun in that?" Dream chuckled when George rolled his eyes and picked up two pictures. "I'm trying to decide which ones I should frame."

"Didn't you buy, like, twenty frames?"

"Yeah, but I only have enough space for three."

"Then why'd you buy so many?"

"Well, I didn't measure out every available spot in my apartment before buying picture frames. And you were the one who said this was a good deal on frames, so..."

George scoffed, yet his lips curved into a fond smile nonetheless. He started sifting through the pile of pictures on the table. "I can't believe you sometimes. Have you decided on any so far?"

"Nope."

"I mean..." George handed him a picture with a close-up on Sapnap's toes. "This is a masterpiece."

Dream wrinkled his nose and set it face-down on the table, laughing. "Why'd I print that?"

George shook his head but continued sifting through the pictures.

Among the pictures, a selfie he and Sapnap had taken at the Minecraft convention stood out. Sapnap held both his phone and the sapling figurine while Dream waved at the camera. They wore bright grins on their faces.

In another picture, half of Sapnap's head took up the lower left corner of the picture. On the other three-quarters of the picture, Dream flinched away from a pan on the stove while George looked like he was mid-shout, his arm blurred as if he were about to push Dream out of the way. Patches, who had witnessed that entire scene and wanted nothing to do with it, was a blur of white and brown on the ground. Sapnap seemed completely unperturbed.

"Hey, what about this?" George said before handing Dream another picture.

Dream had to smile.

It was their final picture together in Dream's apartment. The three of them were squeezed together, Dream in the middle having thrown his arms around his friends' shoulders. Their smiles were warm, their eyes were bright. Even if the picture had only been from a week and a couple days ago, Dream couldn't help but feel nostalgia swelling in his chest.

"Yeah, I like that one. How about these two?" Dream asked, sliding the other two pictures across the table to George.

George flipped through each picture, then handed them back to him with a smile he couldn't bite back. "They look fine."

Later when Dream caught George staring at the pictures he had framed and hung around the apartment with a goofy grin on his face, Dream would only smile.

"Why do you want me to pick out a chair again?"

"Just do it, George."

George rolled his eyes but continued scrolling through catalogues of gaming chairs.

It had been a sleepy Sunday morning before Dream called George into his room and talked him into sitting down at his computer to look through a variety of chairs. After several blocked attempts of George trying to exit out of the gaming chair category, he eventually got the message.

"I don't know," George said, "all of these look fine. Why can't you pick one yourself?"

Dream, who had been standing behind the chair with his arms resting on the top of the chair, set his head on top of his arms. "It's important. Just pick one."

"What I don't like any of these?"

"Then we'll find one you do like. Keep looking."

After another couple minutes of scrolling through several pages of chairs, George finally clicked on one.

"Which color?" Dream asked.

George's eyebrows furrowed, and he hovered the cursor over the different arrangements of color. "I don't know. Why don't you choose?"

"This isn't for me, idiot."

"Then why're you buying the chair?"

"Just choose a color already."

"Ugh, fine." George cycled through the different color choices again and landed on the black chair with dark blue accents. "Here. Happy now?"

Dream chuckled. “Yeah, I am. Was that so hard?”

“Actually, it was. I’m colorblind?”

Dream’s chuckles died along with any sense of pride he had. His heart dropped so far he could almost hear it hit the floor. And honestly, if the floor could swallow him up right now, he wouldn’t be opposed to it.

George froze, then whirled around in his seat with wide eyes (making Dream lose his balance in the process, but he refused to acknowledge that). “Oh my god, I never told you.”

Dream’s mouth moved, but no words came out. He strained his throat to speak. “I… sorry.”

“You look like you want to die right now.”

“I kind of do, yeah.”

There was a suffocating moment of silence before George swung back around to the computer screen and burst out laughing.

“Wha—George!” Dream called, his own laughter starting to pick up despite the heat rushing to his cheeks.

“I can’t, your face was just—” George cut himself off with more laughter, his wings curving in around him. His face wasn’t visible, but Dream was certain he was close to the brink of crying from laughter.

Dream sighed and hid his face behind his hands despite the chuckles bubbling from his own mouth. He waited until George’s laughter died down to say, “I can’t believe you. Why’d you never tell me?”

“I mean, you’ve never really asked,” George said, leaning back into the chair. His wings unfurled, and he swung the seat towards Dream the tiniest bit. “And before you start throwing stuff in front of me and asking me what color they are, I’m red-green colorblind.”

“Wait, so…” Dream furrowed his eyebrows and moved beside George. He extended a hand to type, then moved the mouse to click on an image of two spectrums, one showing typical colors and the other showing how they would appear to someone with red-green colorblindness. “Is this accurate?”

“I guess so.”

“Then…” Dream glanced down at his green hoodie then back at the website.

Oh.

Oh no.

“Wait, you see my hoodie as piss yellow? What the hell?”

George’s laughter kicked back up, and Dream, again, wanted to disappear into a hole thinking of how many uncoordinated outfits he must’ve worn over the months they had known each other.

But George was laughing, right? He laughed without a care for anyone else’s opinion. That made everything alright.

So Dream laughed along, and the two shared a moment of raucous, uncaring laughter.

“Wait, Dream,” George called, looking up over his plate of dinner. “Why’d you order that chair?”

Dream only laughed.

Dream had been fiddling with this list for far longer than he would’ve liked.

Cursed Minecraft. He would start off with that. That was a video people couldn’t resist from sharing with others to share the suffering with. But if he was being honest with himself, the list of content he wanted to include was overwhelmingly underwhelming.

“Dream.”

Dream blinked and swiveled his chair around, only to see George leaning against the doorway with a raised eyebrow. “Oh. Hey.”

“I’ve been standing here for ten minutes and you didn’t notice me the entire time.”

“Wow, you want me to notice you?”

“Not like—” George huffed when Dream laughed. “Not in that way, you idiot. Why do you always have to make it weird? I could tell you weren’t asleep, so I wanted to see what you were up to.”

Ugh. Dream had forgotten that was a thing. He didn’t want to explain so late at night.

But there was something about the genuine concern on his face that made the words die in Dream’s throat. There was complete trust, complete openness in his stance that urged Dream to say what was on his mind but never pressured.

It was easy talking to George. Dream appreciated that more than anything.

“I was thinking of making a cursed Minecraft video where I do stuff that would make people mad,” Dream said, gesturing for George to stand next to him. “I have this list of stuff so far, but it doesn’t seem like enough for a video.”

George hummed as he read through the list. “You could definitely use some more content, yeah.”

Dream sighed. “And this is with Sapnap’s ideas, too. But he was kind of in a rush, so...”

“You’re gonna kill a pet for this video? I need to tell Patches to watch out,” George mused. “These are good ideas, though. Trapdoors as a door, convoluted way of accessing a farm, planting melons without dirt next to it...”

“That last one was Sapnap’s idea, actually.”

“Nevermind, it’s a terrible idea.”

“George,” Dream said, chuckling.

George laughed but continued to read down the list. “I don’t really know what else you’re looking for. I guess since you already have a farm, you could stomp on it a couple times. You can use the wrong tools for the wrong blocks, too, but I don’t think that’ll give the video much more length than you already have.”

Huh. How had he missed that? Dream added those to the list.

“It would be kind of funny if you had an idea with, I don’t know, the beds in the Nether or End?” George shrugged. “I’m just thinking out loud, though.”

Dream wasn’t quite sure what to do with that idea either. Having a bed just straight up explode, while funny to watch when unexpected, would definitely be expected when the title of the video was related to cursed Minecraft. He noted it down anyway.

“I think what you have so far is good, though. If you expand on it enough, that should be good for a full-length video.”

Compliments were nice. Compliments from George were even better.

“Thanks,” Dream said. He turned to smile at George. “Really, thanks.”

For pushing him to start this. For saving his life every day. For interfering with fate. For everything.

George offered him a warm, fond smile back. “No problem.”

All of that went unsaid. Dream just hoped it didn’t go unknown.

“Can you not follow basic directions?”

“You already know the answer to that, George. Now shut up and help me assemble this chair.”

George grinned as he tossed a bolt at Dream.

Dream rolled his eyes but chuckled, leaning back to retrieve the bolt. “You’re such an idiot.”

By the time the chair had arrived, Dream had forgotten he had ordered it in the first place. The knowledge he had forgotten also included the fact he needed to assemble it rather than it coming in one piece. He wasn’t sure what was more trouble: assembling this or having to haul an entire chair all the way up from the ground floor.

After twenty minutes of squabbling and minimum effort work, they had managed to assemble the bottom half of the chair. They had delegated tasks somewhere between that, and now Dream was flipping through an instruction booklet while George fiddled with various screws.

All because George didn’t trust that Dream wouldn’t somehow cut his hand in half with one of the tools. Great.

(Not like that fear wasn't unfounded. Dream was the first to admit that.)

"What's the next step?" George asked.

Dream furrowed his eyebrows as he squinted at the drawing and instructions in the book. "I think they want us to put the back of the chair on next. Use the longer screws."

"What do you mean, longer screws?"

"Second-longest."

George stopped to examine the various screws he had laid out in front of him before picking up the second-longest screw. "And I need two of these?"

"Yeah, two. It should be pretty obvious where they go."

"It is," George said before screwing the back of the chair in place. Then he smiled that certain smile that reminded Dream of moonlight and late nights coding, the one that silenced Dream into listening. "Did I ever tell you about my computer?"

Computer? George had said he worked with coding, but he hadn't said anything about the hardware itself.

"Nothing about the computer, no," Dream said.

"My old computer's hard drive was dying, but I didn't want to move all my files over to a new one. So my best friend just straight up built me a new computer." George laughed softly, fondly. "It took him some time, of course. I wonder if this is along the same lines of what he was doing."

Dream hummed in response, flipping the page to preview the next step. "Did you use that computer a lot?"

"Of course I did. And it ran pretty well until... you know. But I'll never forget that." George's gaze dropped to the screwdriver in his hands. He repeated quieter, "I'll never forget that."

They shared a moment of silence, not awkward but not quite amicable either. Just silence.

George looked up. "What's the next step?"

Dream began dictating the next step to him, and they left it at that. Dream didn't know what else to do with that information.

"What do you mean the chair's for me?"

Dream raised an eyebrow. "I mean, nobody else lives in this apartment. I was getting tired of one of us always having to stand when we're at my computer, so I just got another chair for you."

George's gaze darted between Dream and the chair before finally landing on Dream. "I'm fine with standing, you know. You didn't need to."

"I know I didn't need to. I wanted to."

“Why? I’m not even human.”

Neither flinched at that, not anymore. It wasn’t something to flinch at; it was just reality, and neither could keep denying it.

That didn’t mean it didn’t hurt, though. It felt like a bullet, at least to Dream.

Dream frowned. “You’re my friend. Isn’t that enough?”

“Do you just... regularly buy chairs for your friends?”

Dream opened his mouth to respond before noticing the smirk that threatened to breach George’s face. “That’s literally such a bad joke. That wasn’t even funny.”

“You’re smiling, aren’t you?”

“No.”

George laughed when Dream covered his mouth with his hand, and Dream dropped the hand to laugh along.

God, this was so ridiculous. *George* was so ridiculous. The joke hadn’t been funny enough to even register as a joke immediately, yet Dream found himself laughing like George was the best comedian on Earth. If his taste in humor had declined since he had met George, he wouldn’t be surprised in the slightest.

“But seriously,” George said, a warm smile on his lips. “Thanks, Dream. You don’t need to do any of this, but thanks anyway. I really appreciate it.”

Dream rolled his eyes but couldn’t hold back the smile on his own face. “You’re such an idiot. It’s just a chair.”

George gave him a hum in response, and Dream suspected he didn’t truly believe that. To be fair, neither did Dream. “I still appreciate it,” he said.

Dream turned away, covering his mouth with a hand.

Seeing his friends smile was worth more than anything. He was sure of that.

Huh.

He had been thinking that a lot recently, hadn’t he?

It had hit Dream one late weekday night.

There were two chairs in his bedroom at one computer, two cups of water on the table in front of them right now, two sets of leftovers they had packed up together, two pairs of silverware that needed to be washed, and more pairs he was sure he could point out if he tried hard enough. If somebody had walked in right now, they would assume two people lived in the apartment.

Dream looked up from his place on the left end of the couch.

George was curled up on the other end of the couch, his gaze focused on some obscure dystopian fiction book Dream had forgotten he had. Occasionally, his facial expression would shift: a wrinkled nose, furrowed eyebrows, blank face, and—Dream's personal favorite—a tiny smile and giggle. His wings were curved around him, creating his own bubble of space. He looked at peace.

Patches had climbed up onto the middle cushion of the couch some time ago. It lasted only a couple minutes before surrendering to sleep, splayed over on its side. Neither Dream nor George had moved in fear of disturbing it.

If Dream listened closely, he could hear light rain pattering against the side of the building and onto the roads. The engine of a car driving by would grow faster, reach the highest point of its pitch, then disappear into nothing.

The whole scene felt awfully domestic, as if they were truly just two roommates living life together. Dream couldn't pin when exactly their lives had become so intertwined, but he would be lying if he said he hated it.

No. This was lovely, actually.

Dream tapped his phone on again and scrolled through his social media feed, admiring the atmosphere around him.

Family

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Heart been broke so many times I don’t know what to believe—”

“Oh, suck it up,” George said, breaking two attached popsicles in half. “You can barely tell the difference between the flavors anyway. If you wanted orange, you should’ve just gotten it yourself.”

Dream pouted but accepted the popsicle.

Now that summer was approaching, the Florida heat had only gotten more and more intense. With a week of work done, Dream finally had the luxury of lying in bed with his ceiling fan turned on the highest setting and AC blasting (well, more like trying its best, but Dream couldn’t criticize it too much).

God, it was still hotter than hell in this apartment. He remembered always having a fan on hand when he lived with his family; why had he given that up?

Actually...

Dream glanced at George’s wings. “You have wings. Use them.”

“What do you mean by... oh.” George’s left wing extended upwards before flapping back and forth.

Finally, cool air.

Dream’s eyes fell shut and his lips curved into a smile.

George laughed at that but didn’t speak, instead opting to hum the first few notes of a tune Dream didn’t recognize.

Dream’s heart stopped right when George paused, hesitated, then continued humming.

It was shy, pitchy, wavy, and perfect.

Dream tilted his head away to hide his growing smile.

Being at a grocery store at nine in the evening looking at flowers with his guardian angel (who stood next to him bitching about the temperature) wasn’t how Dream imagined his life would go, but he supposed he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“How do you people deal with this?” George whined, hugging his arms. “It’s blistering hot outside, then when you step inside, you’re in the Arctic. Absolutely ridiculous.”

“That’s why you bring a jacket like I did,” Dream said as he browsed through a row of bouquets.

He ignored the groan and “You’re not even wearing it!” from George. Thankfully, most of the bouquets were still intact. It was a couple days before Mother’s Day; he had to be the luckiest bastard on the planet.

Arrangement of pink and purple flowers, another arrangement with blue and orange, yet another with pink and purple... There was too much variety. What flowers had Dream gotten his mother last year? White and pink? It had to be white and pink.

“... Dream? Dream. Are you listening at all?”

Dream groaned and untied his jacket from his waist. He handed it to George without so much as a glance in his direction. “Do you think I should give my mom a bouquet or a vase?”

By the time George stepped into his line of sight, he had slipped the jacket over his shoulders and now squinted at the flowers. “I guess vase would be more practical unless your mother already knows you’re giving her flowers.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Dream’s gaze flittered from arrangement to arrangement before finally settling on a bouquet of white and orange flowers. He lifted it from the stand. “Do you think this looks good?”

George raised an eyebrow. “Dream, you know I can’t see what—”

“I know. Just tell me if you think it looks good or not.”

“Well...” George paused and stared at the bouquet. “I suppose it does. You know your mum best.”

Huh. He supposed he did.

Dream reached into his pocket for his wallet and began his stride towards the cash register.

And later when they walked back home, Dream refused to take back the jacket and left George to carry it in his arms the entire walk back.

Heh. The jacket was too big for George.

“Mom, I can’t believe you didn’t give me time to clean up before you came. You could’ve sent me a text or call or something.”

Dream’s mother took a sip from the cup of tea Dream had hastily prepared. “So you can hide your messes from me?”

“I mean, it’s not that much of a mess.” Dream glanced at George, who sat on the kitchen counter behind them, only to see he was distracted cooing at Patches.

It couldn’t have been *that* messy. Sure, there were cups everywhere and a sink full of dirty dishes he had intended to clean that night, but that was only the result of two people living...

Oh.

“I promise I didn’t make all this by myself,” Dream said.

His mother laughed and reached over the kitchen table to nudge his shoulder. “I’ll believe you when I see it.” She leaned back in the seat, smirking when she spotted the flowers in a pitcher of water. “Nice flowers, by the way. I wonder who that’s for.”

Dream had to laugh along with that. “You spoiled this year’s flowers for yourself. I’m happy to see you early, but why’d you come? Tomorrow’s Mother’s Day.”

“Figured you’d want some alone time before having time with the entire family. I wanted to check up on you separately beforehand, you know?” She took another sip of tea, and her gaze softened. “I worry about you sometimes.”

Dream’s heart warmed at that.

He was the first of the family to move out; all his siblings still lived at home. On top of that, he had always been particularly close to his mother out of everyone in the family. He would take any opportunity to see her face-to-face, and he was certain she felt the same way, too.

“I’m doing fine, Mom,” Dream said. “How’s everyone else doing?”

That spurred a conversation that went on for who knew how long. They went from discussing his sister’s grades in school to his brother’s experiences learning how to drive to the daily happenings at his father’s workplace. Dream listened as his mother talked about a new recipe she had learned, and his mother listened to his latest adventures in cooking.

It was nice. Dream felt better just talking about nothing with his mother.

“Hey, how’s work going for you anyway?” his mother asked after wrapping up a discussion about a story at his father’s workplace. “Anything new happening?”

Dream hesitated at that.

His mother must’ve noticed, because she frowned soon after the pause. “Sweetheart? You doing alright?”

“Oh, yeah,” Dream said, rubbing his eyes. “It’s, uh... not optimal.”

“What do you mean by that?”

He shrugged despite the two gazes—both concerned in different ways—being directed at him. “I just don’t like it that much. I wish I didn’t have to listen to anyone else, you know? My coworkers kind of suck, too...”

His mother hummed in thought. “You haven’t been with the company for too long. If you can’t see yourself working for them, you have the qualifications to work somewhere else.”

“I don’t really want to work anywhere else, though.”

“Then... where would you work?”

“For myself. I mean, being a freelancer. I mean, being a YouTuber. Freelancing. YouTube. Both?” Dream shook his head. “Either one works. Both work. But that’s what I’d like to do.”

Uh oh. His mother was silent, staring at him with a blank expression.

“Again, it’s just what I want,” Dream said, “not necessarily what—”

“You’d need quite the set-up for that, don’t you think?” his mother said, gazing up like she did whenever she was deep in thought. “I’m certain you know how to market yourself to be a freelancer. You won’t have any trouble doing that. But if you need a camera for the other thing, your father and I can—”

“No, I wouldn’t need a camera,” Dream said quickly. He had to smile. That was the best reaction he could’ve hoped for. “Thank you, but I don’t need a camera. Just your support is good enough.”

His mother chuckled and leaned back in her seat. “Then I guess we’re fine. Your dad and I are here for you all the way, kiddo. But don’t quit your day job just yet.”

Dream laughed along. “That’s what one of my friends said to me.” He raised his glass of water and said, “Cheers to that.”

They clinked their glasses and laughed.

Out of the corner of his eye, Dream could see George hiding a smile behind the tip of a wing.

George. It felt weird to have ignored his presence for so long. What was he thinking right now? Had he been paying attention to their conversation?

Dream swallowed his guilt with the water in his glass.

It was sunset by the time their conversation came to a close. They had decided to take a walk back to the parking garage, thankfully shielded from the sun.

His mother rose from her seat. “I should get going now. I left your brother to take care of dinner, but who knows how that’ll turn out?”

Dream only laughed at that and stood as well, walking with her to her car. “Yeah, go make sure he hasn’t burned the rice again. Thanks for coming to see me, Mom. Really.”

“Aw, it’s no problem. Give me a call sometimes, huh? Relieves my mind a bit.” She smiled and pulled him into a hug he melted into. Her voice dropped to a whisper. “By the way, I noticed something.”

That sounded ominous. Dream’s heart dropped as he waited for her to elaborate.

“You have two controllers out,” she said with a giggle. “If you were seeing someone, you could’ve just told me.”

What.

Dream wormed out of the hug, frowning as she laughed. His face warmed. “Mom! I’m not seeing anyone, I just had a friend over last night, and we played on the console a bit.”

“Who?”

“Well...” Dream scrambled for a lie, any lie. It certainly didn’t help seeing George a couple paces behind them laughing at his pain. “You know Sapnap, right? Summer break started for him a week ago, so he came here for a couple of days and crashed at my place. We took a couple pictures

together, actually. You've seen them around my apartment, right?"

Thankfully, his mother nodded at that. She grinned and pinched his cheek. "I'm happy you have such good friends, sweetheart. Call me whenever, okay?"

Dream sighed but smiled. "Alright, I will. Get home safe."

"Love you!"

"I love you, too, Mom."

With that, his mother entered the car, waved one last goodbye, then drove out of the parking garage.

The silence felt awfully unnerving.

Finally, George clapped a hand on his shoulder, his hand having much more weight than it usually did. When Dream turned, George's wings were gone and he had turned into a solid human being. "Let's go back home. You'll see her again tomorrow."

That was true. Another meeting was less than twenty-four hours away.

"Yeah, let's go home," Dream said.

George's hand dropped, and he offered him a warm smile.

The two started their walk back home, George's hand lingering only a couple centimeters away.

Going out to a restaurant with his family on Mother's Day at the busiest time of day probably hadn't been such a good idea.

Dream winced as soon as he entered the restaurant, and judging by the lost expression on George's face, this was a bit too crowded for him as well. A long line stood at the front desk, and even more people waited in the lobby. All the available chairs were taken. His family had texted him earlier saying they had already reserved a table, but...

"Hey, kiddo! Over here!" came a familiar voice. One he had heard just yesterday.

Dream whirled around, only to see his family waving him over.

Dream's heart warmed. His lips curled into a grin. He stepped forward and—

He's falling, he's falling, he's falling—

"Dream!" came a shout before a pair of arms caught and righted him.

"Oh, my apologies," a waiter said, the drinks on their plate balancing precariously. "Are you alright?"

Dream blinked, and everything came into focus. "O-Oh, yeah, I'm fine. Sorry."

The waiter walked away. Dream couldn't see where George was, nor was he able to bring himself

to look.

Not looking was best for George. That's what was best. He had messed up with Sapnap; he couldn't mess up with an entire group of people next.

Dream scurried down the aisle to his family, where he had been reserved a spot next to his sister.

"Wow, I saw that," his sister snickered in the midst of the regular family greetings.

Dream only rolled his eyes and flicked her head with a smile, settling in for a good lunch with his family.

The family lunch had gone as well as the previous years: Dream greeted his family, bantered and caught up with them, insisted on paying his portion of the meal (though his father always won and paid instead), gave his mother the bouquet of flowers from his car, and left for his apartment after saying his goodbyes. This year was no different, yet there was still something heavy settling in his stomach. Something more than the food.

"What're you doing?" George asked from the passenger seat.

Dream blinked. He glanced at the time, only to realize the engine had been running for a good amount of time. "Oh. Whoops."

George raised an eyebrow but turned to look out the window as Dream started driving. "You look like you're thinking about something."

"Well, yeah," Dream snorted. "Kind of hard not to be thinking about at least something."

"You know what I meant."

"No, I don't know what you mean."

"Dream," George sighed.

Dream slowed the car to a stop at a red light, his fingers drumming on the wheel. The more he thought about it, the more the boulder in his stomach grew heavier and heavier.

He had to say it. There was no way around it.

"I don't know," Dream said quietly. He stepped on the gas pedal when the traffic light burned green. "I don't like having to ignore you. It doesn't feel right."

George leaned back in his seat with another sigh. "Dream, we've talked about this."

"I know we have. I still don't like it. I'm just saying how I feel."

"Why? You were with your family. Don't worry about me for once."

"Okay, logically I know that," Dream said. He was beginning to regret this entire conversation, but his mouth was moving on its own now and the words were tumbling out of his mouth faster than he had anticipated. "I just... I've been around you for so long now, George. You're one of my

closest friends. I'm around you literally every hour of every day. Why would I not want to be able to address you when you're in the room?"

George fell silent.

Dream's throat went dry. He was on the highway now; there was no time for him to glance at George. "It's just how I feel. Do what you want with that."

More silence, then George finally spoke.

"Do you ever wish we met in person before... all of this?" George asked quietly.

"Of course," Dream said with no hesitation.

George hummed. "I think about it a lot. If we had met under better circumstances, I mean. And maybe we would've if I hadn't died so early."

"You don't need to say that."

"I don't know, Dream. I'm not all that scared of it anymore." His voice was calm, resigned. But Dream had spent the past several months being around George for twenty-four hours of each day; it'd be a shame if he didn't know when George was lying.

Dream paused to make another turn. "You're such a liar. You don't have to pretend so much, you know."

George shrugged. "Maybe, but not about me thinking about this often. I just... wonder if we would've been friends if we met on Munchy or something. Or maybe through a mutual friend. Or maybe if you had started freelancing and we met there. Really, there's so many other choices I could've made that might have let me meet you earlier."

That was true. Who knew what might've happened if Dream had pushed himself to fill out a staff application for Munchy? Or if he had started freelancing earlier and gotten his name out there? Would he have met George at all? Would they have been friends?

Dream liked to imagine they would've been. It was inconceivable to think otherwise.

"I think we would've been friends no matter what," Dream said eventually. "Even in this world, we still met. Imagine how the Georges in the other universes are doing. I'd bet half of them are chilling and the other half are yelling at me or Sapnap for something."

George laughed. Victory. "Yeah, I guess. Maybe in some other universe, we're all making videos together."

"That would've been cool."

"That certainly would've been."

Silence fell over them. Dream bit his lip, itching to say something else. He had already gone this far into the conversation. What did he have to lose?

"You know," Dream began, "I can't really imagine life without you."

He meant it with every bit of his heart. He had friends, he had a job, he had family; he lived an objectively good life, albeit a boring one. How could one person worm his way into his life and brighten it up so much? An insult here, a fit of laughter there—Dream treasured all of it.

“You’d probably be dead after tripping over your cat,” George said with a chuckle. He sighed again, but it was fonder, more peaceful. “Even if I’m not technically alive anymore, I’m still happy I got to meet you. Really, really happy.”

And George treasured it all, too.

Holy shit. Dream’s eyes felt warm.

Dream hid that behind a laugh. “You’re so ridiculous. Minecraft when we get home?”

“Sure.”

Alarming George by being overly cocky with his movements during a hardcore speedrun world got boring after a couple of hours. And now Dream scrolled through his server list, reading through each description while George rambled about Dream needing to be more careful.

He had just played on Hypixel earlier that morning. His test server wouldn’t be fun to play on without a plug-in active. He barely logged onto Invaded Lands in the first place.

Oh, Munchy. He hadn’t logged onto there in a while.

The second his mouse hovered over Munchy’s icon, George stopped talking. Something was off.

Dream blinked and turned his head. “Do you not want to play on Munchy?”

George shrugged, but his shoulders were rigid. “You can do what you want. I just can’t guarantee I’ll be around for it.”

Okay. He supposed that was as clear of an answer as he’ll get. Dream clicked on Hypixel’s icon and waited to be logged on.

“Oh,” George said, “you can play on Munchy if you want.”

Dream frowned. “Well, I don’t wanna play without you.”

“It’s alright, it’s not like I’ll cry or something. I’ll stay.”

“It’s not fun if you’re not having fun either,” Dream said, rolling his eyes. He leaned back in his chair. After several months together, he imagined George would feel a tad more comfortable being open. “Just... tell me why you’re uncomfortable with it soon, okay?”

George turned away at that. “Maybe.”

He supposed not. George knew everything about his life yet he still remained so secretive about his own. This was getting frustrating.

Dream pushed a smile to his face and cracked a joke while joining a Skywars game.

George chuckled along, but it didn’t feel right.

None of it felt right.

Chapter End Notes

pro tip: dont be a procrastinating wooden hoe like me 😊
hope you enjoyed

Who are you?

Chapter Notes

(shows up 3 weeks late with starbucks) hey whats up

Scouring through millions of results on Google for one specific person probably wasn't something normal people did, but Dream had far crossed the boundary of normal long ago.

Would refreshing the page do something? Only one way to find out.

Dream sighed and leaned back in his chair. Still 8,8700,000 results on a search with the words George, programmer, and UK. There were only so many more combinations of characteristics Dream could type into the search bar, and he had been at this for two hours.

A bird chirped in the distance. He froze.

It was four in the morning on a Monday. He needed to be up in four hours for work. On top of that, he had stayed up with the intention of building the world he needed to feature in his video. He had booted up a random seed, but no other progress had been made on that.

Dream stared at his reflection on the computer screen. Even his own reflection looked disappointed in him.

How had his life come to this moment?

"Wow, you're having a splendid morning."

"Shut up," Dream mumbled, sweeping the remains of his fallen breakfast while George quietly chuckled at him.

The plate had landed on the floor almost perfectly, its only flaw being it was made of ceramic. It shattered as soon as it hit the floor. A mix of hot scrambled eggs, bacon, and plate pieces splattered across the kitchen floor, and George had dived to prevent Dream from stepping on one of the pieces.

Of course, Dream hadn't been allowed to touch the shards while George was around. But even from a cursory glance at the shards, none of it seemed to fit together. It was like a puzzle comprised solely of pieces from other puzzles. There was no way of solving it without forcing all the pieces together awkwardly or needing more pieces.

It was just a plate he had bought as part of a cheap set. Plates broke sometimes. So why was he so upset about this?

The chuckles were cut off quickly, and George frowned. "You seem quite tired. You need to stop

staying up playing Minecraft.”

“Wow, okay, Mom.”

“Okay, idiot who dropped a plate on the ground.”

That much was true. Dream kept his head down and continued sweeping the plate shards into a dustpan.

Something felt awfully amiss about it.

Creating a list of all the things George had told him about his past life would’ve been an unsurmountable task for anyone who wasn’t Dream. But to be fair, it wasn’t like George gave him too much information to go off anyway. Even with bullet points, the list only took up a little over half of the page.

Digging into George’s professional job title hadn’t yielded much, so he could confidently cross off anything related to that. George had mentioned reading certain books in college, but Dream didn’t think he had the will to scour through hundreds of colleges for one person. Did he even know which degree George graduated with? Or if he went to college in the UK at all?

Okay, next on the list. George used to flip Supreme gear, didn’t he? He had never said which platform he used, but there were only so many platforms there could be that actually turned a profit.

Hm. Interesting. And there could be guides written for flipping luxury items, too. That would be an invaluable find...

Dream opened Google and began searching.

Well, that didn’t work out.

“Seriously, what the hell are you doing at night?” George asked, sipping at a cup of water as Dream rubbed the grogginess out of his eyes. “I know you’re not working on your video. You haven’t even recorded it yet.”

“How do you know I haven’t recorded it yet?” Dream muttered.

“I know you. That video’s not getting done in the next month.”

Just because he was right didn’t mean he had to say it.

George laughed at what must’ve been a sour look on Dream’s face. “Hurry up, you’re gonna be late for work.”

Dream stared down at the keys in his hand.

There was still something off about the whole thing. There couldn't be too many Supreme gear flippers who happened to work as a freelance programmer. On top of that, George had a YouTube channel and had ties to Minecraft. How many people in the world was that combination of person?

Everything was gone. It was almost as if all that information specifically had been scraped off the Internet. But it felt like it was too much, it felt too artificial. There was no way someone's identity—especially someone as active on the Internet as George—could be buried so deeply in the sands of the Internet on its own.

“Hey, by the way,” Dream said, careful to keep his voice calm and level. “I was thinking of something kind of... morbid last night, I guess.”

George frowned. “Well, what is it?”

“My information's gonna be on the Internet forever, right?”

“Technically, yes.”

“It's kind of unsettling to look on something like a Facebook page and find out the person is dead, you know? What if I got someone to just wipe my existence off the Internet forever after I die?” Dream's gaze moved up towards George. “Do you think that'd be a good idea?”

“What the hell kind of thoughts are you having at night?”

“What else kind of thoughts would I have?”

George laughed at that, though whether it was the genuine kind or the uncomfortable kind, Dream couldn't tell. Then the smile faded, and he tilted his head in thought. “I don't know. I guess it depends on what you want the world's perception of you to be after you die.”

And there it was.

“How did you want the world to see you after you died?” Dream asked.

Silence.

He stepped too far. That went too far.

But George only smiled at him with that bright, beautiful smile he always had. “Actually, my best friend and I had this agreement about that. We made it, like... a couple weeks before I died. Great timing, right?” He chuckled. “He told me to delete everything embarrassing about him off the Internet before his funeral if he died first. And I'll just say right now, that's a *lot* of stuff. I don't know if I would've been able to get rid of everything in time.”

There was no bitterness in his voice. He sounded so fond, as if he were recalling a memory of a walk in the park rather than the circumstances of death. He must've had good reason to be fond.

“And you?” Dream prompted, his throat dry.

“Me?” George shut his eyes and hummed. “I don't know, actually. I gave him all my accounts and told him to do whatever he wanted with them after I died. For all I know, he could've transformed all my business pages into a page of crudely drawn dicks.”

Okay, Dream had to laugh at that.

George laughed along but shook his head. “No, he definitely isn't the type of person to do that. I'm

just saying, I have no clue what he did with it.”

“Yeah, I think he might’ve deleted everything,” Dream said.

Then he stopped.

Wait, fuck.

“Wouldn’t be surprised if he did,” George said. He shrugged. “Not like it’s really my business anymore. Now, start walking to work, okay?”

Dream’s heart raced, but he nodded and began his trek to work, George catching the door that almost smacked into him.

That certainly explained a lot. But what was he supposed to do now?

So, there was no information about George online. Dream was certain George lived in the UK, or at least lived there for the majority of his life. That meant he couldn’t just up and investigate physical traces of George’s existence (not that he wanted to in the first place. Bringing up tragedy to the people who cared most seemed like a dick move).

Dream leaned back in his chair, staring at some code his coworker had sent him for review. George sat on the desk space next to him with shut eyes and crossed arms. Was he sleeping? Dream hoped he was sleeping.

What could he do? If everything was wiped from the online realm and it wasn’t possible to access the physical realm, where could he go from there?

Maybe it was possible to access some archives using the Wayback Machine. Would someone’s professional profile even be saved on there? Dream had never used it to search for a business profile before, or even just a specific person. Then again, its presence on the Wayback Machine depended on how well George’s friend knew the Internet.

George’s friend was an interesting figure, right? Maybe he should...

Holy shit. That was it.

“What’re you doing?”

Dream’s shoulders tensed, and he whirled to face George, who had apparently been awake this whole time. What the hell?

“Get off your arse and work,” George said, shutting his eyes again. “You should’ve been done reviewing that code half an hour ago.”

Well. He supposed George was right.

Dream sat up and scoured through the code for its mistakes. The thoughts in his head would need to wait a couple hours.

Dream deserved an entire certificate for the amount of investigating he had to do for this stupid document.

George hadn't said much about his best friend, had he? He must've been a caring person, judging by him sending that blanket to George. But he didn't necessarily live in the UK, did he? George had said he was an online friend who he had met up with once.

Fuck, this guy could've lived anywhere in the world. Dream wouldn't be able to use location to narrow anything down. Hell, he didn't even have a name. Why'd he think this was a good idea?

Dream sighed and eyed the time. He had been at this for a while now, but he couldn't stop now, no matter how hopeless it seemed. That wasn't the kind of person he was.

So he kept going. No matter how heavy his eyelids felt and no matter how comfortable Patches felt snuggling in his lap.

"Oh, good, you're awake now."

That wasn't a voice Dream expected to hear so early, even if he didn't have work today. He blinked away the fog covering his vision and sat up. God, his body ached. Maybe he shouldn't have fallen asleep at his computer. There was no way he had been comfortable throughout that entire night.

Dream stretched his limbs as he looked up at the computer screen. Nothing on the document had changed, thankfully...

Then it clicked.

Fuck.

Oh, fuck.

He whirled around to face George, who sat in the chair next to him with a blank face.

He fucked up. He royally fucked up.

Then George snickered and pulled his knees up to his chest. "Good morning, Dream. How're you doing?"

Dream opened his mouth to answer, maybe to provide any bit of explanation that would save whatever was left of his dignity, but all the words he so desperately wanted to say were clogged at his throat. They clawed away at his throat, tearing and screaming to be let out. All that escaped was air.

George hummed as he scrolled through the document. "You have a good memory to be able to recall all of this. I don't even remember telling you some of these things."

"You're not upset?" Dream blurted.

Of all the words that could've escaped, it just had to be those. Dream wanted to curl up into a ball and disappear.

"Why would I be? You've put a lot of work into this. All into finding out more about me." George smiled as he continued reading through the document. "How'd you go about trying to find my information anyway? I imagine it was hard looking for something that isn't there."

Dream frowned and furrowed his eyebrows. He just woke up, he wasn't prepared for this amount of confusion. "Aren't you surprised?"

George rolled his eyes at that. "You were acting suspicious the whole week, then you asked me that shady question about wiping your identity after death. You're not the kind of person to let yourself disappear after you die, Dream. I could tell something was off."

"So you knew this entire time?"

"Well, not this *entire* time. I walked in when I knew you were asleep and saw this document on the computer screen. I only knew what was going on for sure today.

"And you don't think this is creepy or anything?"

"Of course not—" George cut himself off, then hummed in thought. "Well, I guess it could be considered creepy."

"You just realized?" Dream said, the end of his sentence fizzling off into a fit of laughter.

"I wasn't really thinking about—stop laughing at me!"

That only made Dream laugh harder, to the point he curled in on himself and slammed his fist against the desk. His laughter came out as bright, wheezy cackles.

Soon, George was laughing along, leaned back in the chair as he giggled that laugh that wavered up and down in pitch, that special laugh Dream cherished with all his heart.

Dream couldn't believe he was caught by something as stupid as falling asleep at his computer. But for now, they were two men laughing at an absurd situation, basking in what little sunshine in their lives they could.

And that's what George was in his life, wasn't he? Sunshine.

"You're seriously okay with all that?"

George rolled his eyes. "Dream, I've been telling you this for the last ten minutes now. I don't care."

Dream frowned but tossed a bag of chips to George before taking a seat in the living room's chair.

It was sometime at night after dinner. Music played from Dream's phone as rain pattered against the windows. Patches lied on the couch next to George, who looked way too pleased that Patches had chosen to sleep near him. Fucking traitor cat.

His face burned just thinking about what had happened that morning. George hadn't mentioned it after that, but it had been on his mind the whole day, sneaking into whatever thought he was about to form for the past twelve hours.

"I was thinking about it a lot, though," George said. He giggled in anticipation of what he was about to say. "I'll make a deal with you."

A deal? Dream sat up in his chair, refusing to admit his heart was beating a bit quicker. "Yeah?"

"Post the video, and I'll give you another hint."

Well, that was an awful idea. Dream didn't have to give it more than two seconds of thought before finding too many flaws in it.

"Scammer," Dream said.

Immediately, George scrunched his face. "What?"

"You're trying to scam me."

"How?"

Dream scoffed but couldn't help the grin stretching across his lips. "Do you know how awful of an arrangement that is for me? I put in all the effort for making the video, post it, and you just tell me something stupid like '*I was tall once.*' "

"Why's that the first thing you come up with?"

"I don't know, why's that the first thing you say instead of defending yourself?"

"It was a genuine question!" George huffed. "Besides, you can delete the video if I don't do my end of the bargain. If anything, I'm the one being scammed since you can delete the video whenever."

"I won't delete it!"

"How do I know you won't delete it?"

"What, you think I'm gonna scam you?"

"Absolutely."

The argument continued back and forth for what had to be another hour. By then, the rain had stopped, and Patches had leapt off the couch to walk away into another room. Dream had turned the music off sometime during the argument, but everything meshed together into one memory.

Now, it was just tiring. They had been at this for too long.

"God, fine," George said, his tone weary and frustrated. "Here, I'll compromise. Same deal: you upload a video, and I give you a hint about my life. If you're not pleased with the hint I give you, you can delete it. But if I'm not pleased with the quality of the video, I won't tell you anything."

"How do I know you won't just keep saying the quality of the video sucks?" Dream asked.

"For fuck's sake, Dream. Trust me, okay? This requires trust on both our parts."

He was right about that. They could put as many precautions in place as they wanted, but in the end, they'd both still have to agree to honor the original agreement.

Fuck it. Dream trusted George with his life every day. He could trust him on this one thing.

"Fine," Dream said. "I agree. You'd better hold up your end of the deal, though."

George rolled his eyes and crossed his arms, settling back into reading the book in his lap. "Yeah, I will. I agree, too. I don't know why you want to know me more, but I'll allow it."

Dream stopped.

Why *was* he so interested in finding out more about George in the first place? It wasn't like there was a point to knowing about George's past. Dream's personal philosophy had always been to leave the past in the past, not to drag it out like he was right now.

The more bits of information George dropped about himself, the more Dream ached to know, to catch every breadcrumb he dropped. Whenever Dream thought he knew every side George had to him, he was proven wrong over and over again. George never failed to surprise Dream with every tidbit of information he gave, and Dream couldn't help but appreciate the fun in the surprise every time.

George was fascinating. George was complex. George was *interesting*. He was the most interesting man Dream had ever met, and Dream wanted, *needed* to learn so much more.

"What're you staring at?" George asked.

Dream looked away, picking his phone as heat rushed to his face. "Nothing."

GeorgeNotFound

Chapter Notes

sorry

Dream liked to think of himself as somewhat of a visionary. He imagined everything so colorfully, so vividly he felt he could reach out and touch what he imagined. He wanted to paint all he saw into existence, but the colors that were so vibrant inside his head were faded, muted, dull when they were transferred to reality. Every part of it he touched with his hands toppled over and burned to ashes, forcing him to start over from the beginning.

It was disappointing. This world was so sorely disappointing.

“How’s the video going?” George asked over dinner on a Monday evening.

Dream chuckled as he set their plates, but there was no humor in his tone. “You *know* how the video’s going.”

George snickered. Fucking prick.

Ever since George had made that bet, he had picked up more activities around the house. He volunteered to cook more often, spent more time playing with Patches, transformed into a human more often just to smile at the sun shining down on his skin. There was almost an urgency blazing behind every action he did, such a familiar urgency yet Dream couldn’t quite place his finger on it.

Such a passion for life. That passion framed all of George’s movements, everything he said. Dream could spend hours watching it in action every day.

“What’re you looking at?”

Instead of looking away, Dream smiled. “You.”

There was a moment of silence before George whipped his head back around to the stove and scoffed. “You’re such an idiot, you know that?”

Dream swore he saw a hint of red on George’s face before he turned away completely, but that probably wouldn’t be favorable to bring up. He only laughed in response.

He had never seen George’s face quite that red. He didn’t want it to be the last time.

Completed plugin, check. Bad melon and animal farms, check. Confidence to record a video? Not checked.

Dream’s microphone wasn’t the best, but it would get the job done. He wouldn’t need a camera for

a Minecraft video either. The world was completed. The plug-in ran well. Everything was prepared, so why was he so reluctant to record?

Overcoming his hesitation to build everything antithetical to what he knew about Minecraft had taken so much time, but that wasn't the hard part, was it? It never was. Now that he looked back, that was procrastination in its finest form.

Actually turning on the recording software and talking to himself in his room: that was the hurdle he needed to jump over. It just so happened that that hurdle was a hundred feet tall with barbed wire coating every surface.

Well... maybe just a practice run would be beneficial. He didn't want to hesitate with his movements, after all.

And if he spent the rest of the night running through what he planned to be the first five seconds of his video, that was his business and his business only.

Grocery shopping was a necessity after seeing the contents of their fridge, but apparently the contents of that fridge was enough for George to snark at him while they walked through the snack aisle.

"Have you tried eating a vegetable in your life?" George snickered. "Half of this cart is snacks, Dream."

"I'm aware," Dream muttered underneath his breath.

George only laughed in response.

Even if George's snarky side hadn't shown itself in a while, Dream supposed he shouldn't have let his guard down. Maybe then he would've been better prepared for the roasting session he got the moment they stepped into the grocery store.

"If you're so desperate for healthier meals, then tell me what you want and I'll cook it," Dream said.

Instead of immediately spouting out a bunch of recipe ideas, George fell silent. Concerningly silent.

Dream frowned and turned towards George. "George? What's up?"

"I was just thinking recently," George said, refusing any attempts at eye contact Dream made. "I don't need food anyway, right? You can save a lot of money by buying food for one person."

George seemed too confident of a person for this to be coming from a place of self-hatred. Nothing Dream had recently said to him would've spurred this kind of talk either. So where was this coming from?

When Dream asked as such, George only shrugged with a practiced carelessness. How long had he been practicing for Dream to only notice now?

"Whatever, don't worry about me," George huffed, rolling his eyes. "You're the one who's still

alive. You do what's best for yourself."

"Did it not occur to you that I care about you?" Dream said. He couldn't help the bite in his voice from seeping into his tone, but George didn't seem to care either way.

George shrugged him off.

That was the end of the conversation, but Dream would be damned if that was the last time they brought this up.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Those weren't words Dream wanted to hear at any time of his life, much less at two in the morning when he was supposed to be sleeping in preparation for a day at work the next day.

Dream's gaze stayed on the computer even as George clambered into the chair next to him. "Practicing. Don't wanna record just yet."

"Why not?"

"It's just... weird. It doesn't feel right."

"Because you're not used to it, idiot."

Dream rolled his eyes and kicked George's chair as George giggled. "You're so stupid. You know that's not what I meant. What're you doing here anyway?"

George paused, then shrugged. "I don't know. I just wanted to be near you, I guess."

Damn it, his heart did a flip off a building and splattered on the ground at that. He must've had too much soda that day.

"What does that even mean?" Dream asked.

"Like hell I know."

They left it at that, but there was something about having someone precious next to him as he whispered through his script and ran through the the three minutes. His movements didn't feel as clumsy, he didn't grasp for the right word to say, he didn't feel stupid sitting in his room at two AM practicing through something that nobody else would practice this much for. It was like a sleepover—when's the last time he had a sleepover?

Somewhere during the practice run, George had leaned back against his chair and dozed off.

Dream couldn't help but chuckle at that, even if that mistake necessitated him starting the script over.

Precious indeed.

It was hard to focus at work.

Dream stared at the code in front of him, but the text jumbled into an indistinguishable mess of letters and numbers. Three fingers hovered over the WASD keys, tapping at the keyboard in the same way he had practiced so many times. Even without the headset, he could still hear the sound of his Minecraft avatar walking across the grass, the whines of a dog he had tamed, the baas and bawks from the animal farm. It was all so colorful in his head, so vivid he could almost reach out feel the warmth from the lava in his house.

“You’re an idiot if you think I don’t see what you’re doing,” George said.

Dream blew air out of his nose, not quite at the point of laughing but tickled enough to allow a grin on his face for a few seconds. He opened a word document and typed, *Guess I’m an idiot. But you’re as much of an idiot as me.*

George scoffed at that but turned away as if he could hide the smile on his face.

Nerd. Such a fucking nerd.

Dream’s thoughts wandered back to the world he had already spent hours of his life on.

He didn’t mean to brag to himself, but there was something beautiful about the cursedness of it all: the green melon stems, the bright red lava, the glimmer on his diamond armor enchanted with sharpness. Maybe he was blinded by how much effort he knew he had put into the world. The whole scene was meant to be ugly, after all.

But did George see what he saw? Maybe not quite literally, but could he see the beauty behind it all, too? Did he see even one percent of what Dream had seen last night?

God, he hoped so. If not, he wasn’t sure it was all worth it.

All the footage practiced. Holy fuck, that took way too long.

Dream sighed after taking a gulp of water and raised two fingers to his throat. Even though he was whispering the whole time he practiced, his throat felt dry, scratchy. Maybe practicing for four hours straight wasn’t a great idea after all.

But it was all done. Now, all he had to do was...

Press record. Right.

His voice could last through a five minute and a half recording. He had practiced this run so much he was certain he could run through the world with his eyes closed. There was nothing stopping him from recording this video and getting it done with besides himself.

Dream looked over, half-expecting a figure sitting in the chair next to him. He frowned when all he was met with was cold emptiness.

It felt wrong. All of it felt intensely wrong without George by his side.

There was no defined time limit on this, but Minecraft was starting to kick back up after years of inactivity in the mainstream eye. Ideally, this video would be released before the hype started to die down again.

Tomorrow.

Dream exited out of his world and shut down his computer. He went to sleep with dreams of an asymmetrical house and broken melon farm.

When he woke up, he found himself reaching out for a world so, so close to breaching into reality.

“Come on, release a video with me. Isn’t it summer break for you?”

“Dream, you dick, it’s been only been three weeks since my last final.”

“That should’ve been plenty of time.”

Sapnap huffed, and Dream felt their patience collectively eroding.

Granted, Sapnap had probably wanted to sleep in after a semester of waking up early for an eight AM class he had made the mistake of taking. A better move would’ve been to call him after Dream was done with work. Maybe Sapnap would be marginally more awake then.

“Dream, I can’t just come up with a video idea in two seconds,” Sapnap said. “And did you forget I have summer classes?”

“Why the hell did you take summer classes?” George laughed.

“Shut up, you’re not part of this!”

Dream laughed as George reached out to hold the phone microphone closer to him, and another argument over nothing surfaced.

He missed this. They were the most dysfunctional pair of idiots Dream had had to wrangle, but they were *his* dysfunctional pair of idiots. Life wouldn’t be the same without either of them.

“Okay, okay, that’s enough,” Dream said, laughing. “Sapnap, come on. *Come on.* ”

Sapnap clicked his tongue, and Dream could practically see him shaking his head. “That’s kinda inappropriate, isn’t it?”

“What?”

“Sapnap, you’re such an idiot,” George said, but even then he couldn’t hide the way his last word dissolved into a fit of laughter.

Nothing was funny enough for all three of them to be laughing this hard. Maybe they felt as elated as Dream did to just be talking to each other again.

All good things come to an end, but that didn’t mean Dream couldn’t lean back into the couch and relax with his two best friends in the world.

“What the hell are you doing?” George sure had a penchant for asking that question, didn’t he?

Dream wasn’t quite sure what the answer to that question was either, but to his credit, he was getting much better at not jumping when George barged into his room at random hours of the night. He shrugged, positioning his body to cover as much of the recording software on the screen as possible.

George, apparently having a set of functioning eyes, sighed at his attempt to body-block the screen. “Dream, I can recognize OBS from a thousand meters away. I know you’re recording a video, too. You don’t have to hide it from me.”

“You recognize OBS?”

“Yeah? I told you that I had a channel before, didn’t I?”

Oh, right. He did. Any shame Dream would’ve felt at not remembering was replaced with... excitement? Anxiety? Curiosity.

“Are you still holding up on that promise?” Dream asked as George moved to sit down in the chair next to him. “You’re not scamming me?”

“As if I would scam you.”

“Um, you would.”

George paused. “Okay, maybe I would, but not for this. You have my word as an angel.”

“As a *guardian* angel.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

Dream faltered at that, turning his head to look away. It felt all too much like he was being scolded by his mother.

“Dream,” George sighed, the bite in his tone fading into something softer. “You’ve already put all this work into everything about this video. How long can you keep putting this off for?”

He had a point. The plug-in had been coded a couple months ago, and Dream certainly could have gone without the sheer amount of practice he had put into this one video. In fact, he could have recorded at least five videos in the time he took to create this one video. All of his actions in the past had been in his own self-interest; he had never been one to sabotage himself like this. Why?

He knew why.

“I don’t know,” Dream muttered. His head felt fuzzy. “It’s like—It’s one thing to make a video but it’s a completely different thing uploading it for everyone to see, you know? I want as many people to see this as possible, but the thought of everyone seeing the world I made, hearing my voice... I don’t know how to describe it.”

For a second, there was silence. Stiff, suffocating silence. In that second, Dream became hyperaware of the bead of sweat dripping down the side of his head and his quick heartbeat. When

had that happened?

Time stopped when George offered him a warm, gracious smile befitting of an angel. His mouth moved as if he was speaking, but any sound he made was muted, faded into the background while George himself took the stage. As Dream's gaze traced the edges of his lips and met his eyes, he realized.

George made the world so much brighter. George was the color of the drab world, the light shining down from the stars, the warmth granted so lovingly by the sun. With him, Dream could...

"Make this video with me," Dream blurted. When George stopped speaking to give him a confused glance, he pushed his regrets to the side and elaborated. "I'm not asking you to talk or anything. I just... want you next to me while I make this."

"Why're you even asking?" George scoffed. He scooted closer to Dream and laughed the fondest laugh. "Of course I can stay here. I'd love to."

And he meant that. So genuinely he felt it'd be absurd not to.

Dream felt his heart could burst. He could cry at this very moment and it wouldn't be enough to convey just how much he wanted to melt on the spot.

But he didn't. He smiled back, cleared his throat, and after a brief moment of hesitation, clicked the record button.

"Come on, Dream," came Sapnap's voice over the phone. "I'm gonna count from three and you're gonna post that video, okay? Say it with me, George."

Dream rolled his eyes but couldn't keep the grin off his face as his mouse hovered over the upload button.

"Three," George and Sapnap said, their voices just barely mismatched from the lag on call.

So many months of work were spent on his first video. The fear of letting himself be known to the world, of all his plans failing—he crossed all those hurdles to get to right now.

"Two."

He had the support of his family and Sapnap and George. That was all he needed to thrive.

"One."

It would only get easier from here.

"Pog!" Sapnap shouted right as George said, "Upload!"

Dream clicked, and the progress bar for upload began to load.

Relief washed over him even as Sapnap and George screamed at decibels far louder than any human should hear. He could breathe, he could run, he could jump—he was free! The chains of doubt trapping his feet had splintered in half. Freedom had never felt better before.

But there was one catch to this whole thing, something Dream still needed.

Dream turned to George.

George, still in the midst of laughter, reached over and opened a new tab. He clicked open the document Dream had written all his notes on George's history in, hovering the mouse hesitantly, almost shyly over a certain word at the very end of the document.

GeorgeNotFound.

Dream chuckled.

How ironic of him.

Where are you?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The first thing Dream did with that information was plug the name GeorgeNotFound into every website he could under the cover of the night. There was no way George didn't know what Dream was doing when Dream excused himself from the dinner table early, but that was fine; Dream figured conducting investigation right there in front of George would be a tad rude.

The results were strange, to say the least.

Nothing popped up when he typed the name into Instagram or Twitter, but there were multiple for other platforms. GeorgeNotFound on YouTube was a small channel with less than a hundred subscribers. GeorgeNotFound on Twitch had an even fewer amount of followers. Both platforms had the same profile picture and biography. In fact, they linked to each other, meaning George must've had at least some videos up.

But it was all expunged. It was like somebody had gone through everything manually and wiped it clean.

George couldn't have done it himself right before Dream uploaded his video. He *wouldn't* have. George had trusted him with what could be the key to his past life; Dream would put his trust in George, too. Besides, George didn't seem to care too much about what happened to his identity online after he died. The only person who did was...

Ah. His friend must've purged those accounts.

But why would that friend leave the accounts themselves behind? He surely must've known how to completely wipe them from existence if he completely purged the rest of George's identity everywhere else. On top of that, the profile picture and biographies were left completely untouched. If he went as far as deleting every video that was uploaded or streamed, why not delete those, too?

Dream looked further. No channel was listed under George's affiliated channels or his streamer suggestions. They were either deleted or nonexistent.

There he was at another dead end. George clearly thought there was something more here; he wouldn't have chosen this specifically as a hint otherwise. There had to be something more beyond the surface.

... Was he seriously going to write another Java script to scrape for any mention of GeorgeNotFound? That seemed to be the only option left.

That and George had trusted him with that username for a reason. He had made that *bet* for a reason. Even if he didn't want to outright tell Dream about his past life, he set the breadcrumbs in a methodical manner in front of Dream, trusting he was smart and determined enough to crack the case. Trusting he *cared* enough to crack the case.

And he was right: Dream cared more than he liked to admit.

Dream groaned and opened Eclipse.

The plug-in for his next video would have to wait. George was far more important than any YouTube video.

Actually...

Dream opened his video on YouTube and scrolled down to the description. He had included a link to his Twitter in the description, but maybe he should—

Yeah.

Dream smiled and read the new addition to himself.

“Special thanks to George :)”

“What script is this for?” George asked, pausing from his humming. He swung his legs back and forth from his spot on a clean part of Dream’s work desk. “You were working in Python for the client from yesterday, weren’t you?”

Dream shrugged and opened a word document. He typed, *Project for a new client. Kinda threw the Python project on someone else.*

George scoffed and rolled his eyes, but Dream spotted the split second smile from the reflection of his monitor. “You’re the worst type of coworker, you know that?”

Dream only shrugged and laughed.

“But, you know,” George said, turning his head back down to browse through various documents on Dream’s desk. “I’ve been dead for quite a while now. You start to miss stuff like work, even the numbing, soulless kind.”

Work? George was a freelance programmer. He probably wasn’t talking about the same type of work Dream was thinking of, was he?

What, did you not have any hobbies or anything? Dream typed with a smile on his face to indicate he was joking.

Thankfully, George laughed at that. “I had hobbies, Dream, I wasn’t a complete loser. But the biggest part of my life was my work, yeah.” He sighed and looked off at nothing, nostalgia and fondness lacing his tone. “I kind of miss it sometimes. I wasn’t, like... passionate about a lot of things, but I did enjoy my work.”

Work. To George, that was coding.

Dream knew what to do.

Code with me then, Dream typed. *You’re probably better at coding than me. I could use the help for coding my next plug-in.*

Then the shine in George’s eyes... exploded into a galaxy of stars, all its light shining down on Dream right now. A bright grin stretched across his face, and Dream’s heart melted under the sheer warmth of it.

He was an angel. Of course, Dream had known that since the moment he met him, but god, he was so overwhelmingly radiant Dream felt like the sun itself was shining down on him

“I’d love to,” George said, almost giggling through his words. “How much of the plug-in have you already done? What’re you planning to do for your next video? Do you have a list?”

As George rattled off more questions than Dream knew what to do with, Dream turned back to his computer and melted in his seat, thankful George couldn’t see the red blooming on his face.

The script to scrape for GeorgeNotFound had been easy enough to program. So many pages searched through yielded only one result: a link back to someone with the handle *@AlyssaNotFound* on Twitter.

Whoever ItsAlyssa was didn’t seem to post very much. In fact, it had taken less than a minute to scroll all the way down to the bottom of her Twitter page and read the very first tweet.

ItsAlyssa *@AlyssaNotFound*
@georgenotfound is my favorite person

Was this... Was this the best friend George had been talking about all this time? It couldn’t be, right? Then again, Alyssa could use he/him pronouns. Nothing on Alyssa’s profile confirmed nor denied that. Dream could always scrape for Alyssa’s name, but he was certain Alyssa was still alive. He’d just feel like a creep then.

And that was how Dream ended up rambling about the ethics of searching too deeply into people’s names to George at five in the morning over a lukewarm bowl of cereal.

“Dream, slow down,” George said, rolling his eyes. “I can feel you’re gonna choke on cereal and I’m gonna have to perform a Heimlich Maneuver on you. Can you summarize all of that but slowly?”

Dream chewed carefully before swallowing the bit of cereal in his mouth. He took a moment before speaking again. “The only thing your hint led me to was this person named Alyssa, but I feel kinda... I don’t know, *iffy* about the morals of searching that extensively into a person.”

“Yeah, you probably shouldn’t.”

“I know, I’m not going to.” That was a decision he had made early into his search that night: no stalking people’s online identities unless he had their explicit permission. It felt too much like encroaching boundaries.

But there had to be something deeper. There had to be a meaning behind George’s hint.

“Is Alyssa the best friend you were talking about?” Dream asked.

George shrugged, then gave him a cheeky grin. Bastard. “I don’t know, is she?”

“... She’s not, isn’t she? You didn’t use those pronouns when you were talking about your best friend.”

“Why don’t you ask her?”

Contacting people who had known George in his past. Now, *that* was a new one.

Dream frowned at George’s trembling hand moving to pick up his cup of water. “Is that really okay?”

“Of course it is. Why wouldn’t it be?”

“You’re shaking.”

“It’s a tad cold.”

It was the middle of summer in Florida, and the weather was clear. There was no reason for anyone to be cold. And while Dream wasn’t sure how temperature worked with non-human entities, he doubted George was cold enough to tremble like that.

“I won’t keep searching if you don’t want me to,” Dream said.

George shook his head after taking a sip of his drink. “I told you the hint. You can do what you want with it.”

“I’m serious.”

“I’m serious, too.”

And he was. George’s hand had stopped shivering. It gripped the bottom of the cup, his other hand wrapped around the handle. He sat straight up, and everything around him radiated security. His gaze was hardened, focused. He was completely at attention, ready to refute any argument Dream threw his way. Dream couldn’t win against that.

“You look so British right now,” Dream breathed.

Then the entire atmosphere shattered, and fits of laughter were released in its stead.

“Dream, what the hell?” George said, laughing. He moved his mouth as if he wanted to say more, but laughter interrupted anything he tried to say after that.

Dream’s chest rose and fell erratically as he wheezed out laugh after laugh, his abdomen starting to ache from overuse.

The conversation switched to a different topic. It was only when Dream lied in bed later that night when he realized George had never answered Dream’s indirect accusations.

The exact words had taken four hours to formulate, but when they did, Dream didn’t hesitate on pressing the send button on the Twitter DM.

Dreamwastaken [12:06] Hey, sorry to interrupt your day, but I wanted to ask if you happen to know GeorgeNotFound? Or are open to talking about him?

Dream let out a sigh of relief and leaned back in his seat.

It was lunchtime in the office, but Dream's lunch had gone forgotten on his desk. With George looking away respectfully ("I'm texting my mom, get out," Dream had jokingly said) and scouring through various scripts on Dream's computer. Client confidentiality was probably an issue, but Dream didn't think standard legal procedures applied to angels. Dream was seated in his chair facing the entrance to his cubicle while George stood over the computer.

While Alyssa didn't seem to post a lot, the Tweets in her liked tab were recent enough Dream had good reason to believe she was relatively active on Twitter. And—

Oh. She replied.

Dream tapped on the incoming DM faster than he would've liked to admit.

AlyssaNotFound [12:07] Who's asking?

Dream caught his laugh before it could escape.

That was ominous. It felt like the response of a mafia member who was asked about the boss by somebody on the street. Image of George as a mafia boss notwithstanding, Dream responded.

Dreamwastaken [12:07] I was an online friend of George's. Your profile was the only place I could find George again.

AlyssaNotFound [12:07] How did you meet him?

Good. Not a question he hadn't already thought about, even if he feels bad about lying.

Dreamwastaken [12:07] On MunchyMC

AlyssaNotFound [12:07] Around when?

Dreamwastaken [12:07] Like three to four years ago?

AlyssaNotFound [12:07] And... you know he's not on this planet anymore, right?

Dreamwastaken [12:07] Yeah.

AlyssaNotFound [12:08] Oh.

AlyssaNotFound [12:08] I'm sorry. Give me a moment please.

The messages stopped after that. Dream pocketed his phone with a frown.

Was that the right move? He had tried his best to be gentle with the reminder of a lost friend, but sometimes no amount of carefulness could lighten the hurt from such a reminder. Maybe he should've let bygones be bygones and allowed the subject to finally—

"Dream."

Dream snapped his head up and swung his chair to face George, only for his heart to leap up into his throat from the sheer brightness of George's smile.

"You've coded so much for this company," George said. He turned back to the computer screen, scrolling through years worth of code. "You should look back through them sometime. You've really improved a lot."

Yeah, no. Dream had a feeling he'd throw up if he tried to look at the spaghetti code he had written as an eighteen year old.

But George's smile. He had loved his smile from day one, hadn't he?

AlyssaNotFound [19:40] Hey

AlyssaNotFound [19:40] I'm not the best person to talk about this, so is it ok if I hook you up with a friend instead?

The text had come in the middle of a walk in the park with George, silence amongst them as Dream watched George admire the scenery. Or possibly it wasn't simply admiring the scenery, but feeling everything the world had to offer. George had walked out of his apartment as a human, after all. He could feel the intense rays of the summer sun, the savior that was the light breeze, the sound of leaves being tickled by the wind—all the sensations he had taken for granted three years ago.

Dream couldn't know. He wasn't a mind reader, but sometimes he wished he was a bit better at reading George.

Either way, George glanced up when Dream's phone vibrated in his pocket and asked, "Is it anything important?"

"Just a text from my sister," Dream said.

George returned to drifting in his own world without complaint. Dream had the feeling they both needed this moment of silence.

Dreamwastaken [19:41] Yeah, it's totally cool

Dreamwastaken [19:41] Sorry if this just came out from left field by the way, didn't mean to surprise you

AlyssaNotFound [19:41] No worries! I'm gonna redirect you to my friend @CallahanIsCool

AlyssaNotFound [19:41] He can explain this better than I can

Dreamwastaken [19:41] Thank you!

AlyssaNotFound [19:41] No problem!

The texts felt awfully corporate, but Dream busy enough trying to craft his next Twitter DM. It felt like an eternity before he finally found the right words to say.

Dreamwastaken [19:44] Hey, Alyssa redirected me to you?

CallahanIsCool [19:44] yeah

CallahanIsCool [19:44] you play minecraft?

Dreamwastaken [19:45] yeah? A lot actually

CallahanIsCool [19:45] you play on Munchy?

Dreamwastaken [19:45] yeah

CallahanIsCool [19:45] what's your user

Dreamwastaken [19:45] dream

CallahanIsCool [19:45] just dream?

Dreamwastaken [19:45] yeah

Dreamwastaken [19:45] i used to be dreamonpvp, but im dream now

CallahanIsCool [19:46] alright hold up

"Dream, look at this."

Dream looked up from his phone and offered George a smile. “Yeah?”

“I’ve never seen this type of flower before,” George said, holding up a purple flower with five short stems protruding from the middle. Thinner, longer strands of purple were extended all around the flower just above the typical array of petals.

Oh! Dream’s definitely seen those around his mother’s garden before.

Dream reached a hand out to stroke the petal of the flower. “It’s a passion flower. They grow a lot here in Florida.”

“Oh. They definitely don’t in the UK.”

“No shit, idiot.” Dream took his hand off the flower and offered him a smile. “Passion flowers are pretty cool. Did a project on them in third grade, I think.”

“What’d you learn?”

“Absolutely nothing.”

George laughed. Dream followed suit soon after.

“It was a project from over a decade ago,” Dream said, chuckling. “What did you expect?”

Even after George’s laughter faded away, a grin remained on his face. “Better, I suppose.” But his smile melted into something sadder as he glanced back down at the flower.

Dream frowned. “You alright?”

“Yeah. Just thinking.”

And there was nothing anyone could do to bug the thoughts out of George when he said that. Dream had to let him keep his distance, and it was the hardest thing he’s ever had to do.

His phone buzzed again. Great timing, Callahan.

CallahanIsCool [19:50] k im back

CallahanIsCool [19:50] you cool with passing your phone number to my friend?

CallahanIsCool [19:50] i think youre good, but he still wants to make sure of something first

Huh. What was the first rule of Internet safety he had learned for his cybersecurity certification? Wow, he wondered.

“Hey, George,” Dream called. “Do you trust your friends are good people?”

It took George a couple seconds to process what Dream had said before he looked up with furrowed eyebrows. “Yeah? I mean, I would’ve have been friends with them if I didn’t think they were good people.”

“Right. Thanks.”

George’s gaze lingered on him, but he eventually turned to study something else.

Dreamwastaken [19:51] can i know who this friend is first?

CallahanIsCool [19:51] @Punztw

Punztw. He was relatively active on Twitter just like Alyssa, but he tended to post more often than he liked other posts. Links to his other social media outlets were posted in the biography. Scrolling through the last couple of his tweets... he didn't seem like a bad person. Not at all. So was it worth it?

It was for George. That was enough by itself. That, and he could always tank this guy's YouTube and Twitch career if he did anything terrible.

But he'd better double-check.

Dreamwastaken [19:52] Hi, are you Callahan's friend?

Punztw [19:52] yup

Okay. That mystery was solved.

Dream narrowed his eyes as he typed out his phone number to someone he hadn't even known for an hour, all his cybersecurity training be damned.

CallahanIsCool [19:52] thanks

CallahanIsCool [19:52] we'll get back to you in like an hour or smth

He was starting to think this was a scam.

But whatever. Dream pocketed his phone and watched as George reached his hand out to another flower, his smile just as bright as when he looked at the passion flower.

That smile promptly disappeared when Dream tripped over nothing and almost got his head banged up by a boulder, but he appreciated the moment while it lasted.

Whatever was causing the hold up must've been exacerbated, because it took far longer than an hour for them to get back to him.

UNKNOWN NUMBER [23:42]: hey this is Punz. is this the right number?

Dream squinted at the screen and turned off auto-rotate to read the message.

Both him and George had agreed to go to sleep earlier that night (mostly because the sleepier Dream got, the clumsier he was, but he preferred to think he was just taking care of his health), and Dream couldn't be more thankful for that. He renamed the contact in his phone before texting back.

Dream [23:43] yeah, right number

Punz [23:43] ok good

Punz [23:43] sorry for the wait, we were checking some background stuff

Well, that was ominous. But Punz sent another text before Dream could ask.

Punz [23:44] you free right now?

Dream [23:44] i guess so yeah

Punz [23:44] cool

Punz [23:44] get on munchy

Punz [23:44] you should have access to a new thing now

A new thing? How vague.

Punz [23:44] oh by the way

Punz [23:45] i dont mean to scare you or anything like that but

Punz [23:45] lmao actually i do

Punz [23:45] we're trusting youre who you say you are

Punz [23:45] we have your phone number

Punz [23:45] if you mess up anything on that thing you have access to

Punz [23:45] i'll personally destroy your life :)

Punz [23:45] the others will too but me especially

Oh, huh. They meant business. But there was one flaw with that argument.

Dream [23:46] don't i have your phone number too?

Punz [23:46] burner phone

Dream [23:46] oh ok

Dream [23:46] well you have no need to worry

Punz [23:46] for all of our sakes, i hope you mean that

And he did. For George, and for every single one of his friends.

Dream climbed out of bed and crawled onto his chair, booting up his computer with a yawn. By the way Patches (who had apparently fallen asleep on the floor next to him) stretched and paused before jumping up into his lap, he supposed Patches had been woken up from his footsteps. He murmured a quick apology before logging onto Minecraft and opening the server.

He hadn't been on in some time, actually. The hub still looked the same as always, with the same character avatars standing in their respective places. Being the middle of the night during the summer, the server had a good amount of people in it.

But there was something new in his hotbar: an enchanted golden helmet labeled "404".

Huh. That was strange.

Dream hovered over the item in his hotbar and right-clicked, only to be taken to a loading screen.

And when the world finally loaded, his world screeched to a halt.

Chapter End Notes

Punz [13:22] dude you didnt delete that tweet???

Alyssa [13:22] of course i didnt

Alyssa [13:22] how could i

Alyssa [13:22] george is my favorite person. it's the truth and i will defend it

Alyssa [13:22] no matter what.

Alyssa [13:23] and i know you know the feeling punz.

Punz [13:23] ...

Here you are

Chapter Notes

Ponk [23:49] are you fucking kidding me?

Ponk [23:49] i step out for one day and i miss this?

Punz [23:49] <3

Ponk [23:49] ugh time to fix your shit

The world was strange.

Dream blinked as the final parts of the world generated before him.

The world was made entirely out of blues and yellows, shades of black and white. A beacon was placed right in the middle of the golden temple spawn area, pillars of quartz supporting the structure. When he looked up, yellow stained glass covered the top of the spawn area. Three sides of the spawn area were walled off with quartz stone brick. What was this supposed to be? He was no builder, but somehow these colors didn't seem right...

Well, every other wall was blocked off except for the one leading to the corridor in front of him. There was nothing else to see in this spawn area.

Before he could move, it popped up in the chat box.

Ponk has joined the game.

Uh oh. Dream didn't recognize that name.

<Ponk> are you the new guy?

There was no way he was referring to anyone else, right?

<Dream> i am new here yes

<Ponk> ok hold still for a second

<Ponk> youre gonna need a couple packs to actually see everything

<Ponk> discord tag?

That certainly explained the design. And if Ponk was in this world, that must mean he was a trustworthy person. At least, to the people Dream had already talked to, and the entire process for that said enough by itself. Dream typed his Discord tag in the chat and waited before accepting a friend invitation and clicking the download button for the files Ponk sent him.

Not before scanning it with an antivirus first, though. Can never be too careful in this day and age.

Dream restarted Minecraft and went through the same golden helmet access point as before. But the second he equipped the texture pack, the world generated with a new brightness.

This... This was a castle. The colors were more vibrant, more detailed. They meshed together into a work of art, the beacon shining like a star through the colored glass on the ceiling. It was as if he

had been teleported to another, more beautiful dimension.

The spawn area had already left him breathless. What else was left to see?

Dream took the first step forward. Then the next. And the next. Walking was too slow, sprinting was too slow. Weights were tied to his legs, and all he could do was crawl aimlessly through the corridor.

Then the light disappeared, and there was something, something too familiar chasing him down the corridor.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck—

The chains buried into the floor, and the air filled with gray smoke. It felt urgent, miserable, *helpless*. All he could do was run, run, run, run, *run* from whatever feeling was chasing him through the hall as it breathed down his neck.

Then when he finally approached the lantern hanging over an archway to another room, he stopped, coughing the smoke out of his lungs and falling helplessly to his knees. The chaser had retreated back into the darkness, never to be seen again. But when he looked back, the corridor was, by all means, normal.

What was that? The files he had downloaded were texture and resource packs, not mods. So why was his heart pounding so hard from a game?

Ugh. He didn't want to think about that. He needed to move on.

The arch led to a ballroom made of wood from floor to ceiling. Lanterns had been placed just enough for everything inside to be visible. The lightning was warm like a hug, a reprieve from what he had just experienced.

Dream stepped through.

His breath hitched.

The world was an explosion of memories. Pictures of George as the central figure were pinned on the walls. Signs were placed beneath each picture, though he wasn't close enough to read what they said. Books were placed in the item frames littered on every surface of wall that was available, and he could only assume the chests scattered around the room were filled with them, too. There seemed to be no particular order to the pictures from the cursory glance Dream had of the area; more needed to be generated.

Before the world could generate, there was a short wall in the way, something of a message board. Signs covered every surface of it.

Dream took a closer look, then his breath cut off.

*You're my favo-
-rite person.
Love you. Rest.
-Allysa*

*To my friend
To my brother
To George.*

-Punz

*Rest now george
You're the best
part of me.
-Ponk*

*You've done
enough. Rest
now my friend.
-Callahan*

*Best friends
Always, forever.
I love you.
-Darryl*

Then the torrent of emotion came crashing onto him, dragging him out to sea. The storm was tumultuous, unrelenting. The warmth inside him exploded into a million fiery pieces and dropped into the sea like messages in bottles.

George. George, George, George—

Dream took his hand off his mouse and slapped it against his mouth, a familiar wet warmth building behind his eyes. With his other hand, he typed a `worldedit` command into the chat.

Unknown command.

Every block of this memorial was placed by hand, so lovingly by hand. Building just the corridor must've taken weeks at the least. But maybe that was the point. Building layer by layer by layer, putting off the construction of the actual memorial site—that could've only been the product of grief.

But the site was constructed anyway. The builders persevered. And that was the strength only the strongest, most unfiltered grief known to man could bring.

As Dream stewed in his thoughts and the clot of emotions knotted in his stomach, a Minecraft avatar wearing a red mask teleported to him.

<Ponk> oh you found it

<Ponk> i dont know why i say that like im surprised, it was one corridor

Dream's fingers hovered over his keyboard, rigid and frozen.

<Dream> all of you made this?

<Ponk> yeah haha

<Ponk> took a good while

<Ponk> bad worked on it the most though

<Ponk> bad set up the area and wanted to get the outline done before we put in our memories but he would just.

<Ponk> feel lost.

<Ponk> you know?

<Ponk> then one day he opened the area to us and told us to build the best damn memorial the

entirety of minecrafts ever seen
<Ponk> not in those words
<Ponk> but pretty close

Something about the tone of those words told Dream he wasn't the only one only barely holding back another wave of emotions.

<Dream> bad?
<Ponk> oh sorry
<Ponk> darryl
<Ponk> hes owner of the server

Darryl. So that was George's best friend?

<Dream> sorry, im kind of disconnected from the general friend group
<Ponk> no worries man
<Ponk> how about i just give you a tour of the area?

Dream took a moment to look around the memorial. While the building itself seemed neat and organized, even just one conversation with most of the builders told him it'd be more chaotic beneath the surface. Ponk wouldn't be offering if he didn't think it was needed, after all.

<Dream> sure
<Ponk> cool
<Ponk> do you want to like. Get in a vc on discord?
<Dream> im down

Dream had just finished wrapping his headphones around his ears by the time the notification for Ponk's call came in. He clicked accept, then said a tentative "Hello?".

"Hey, it's Ponk," Ponk said. Dream liked to think his voice matched his Minecraft skin somewhat. His voice was on the deeper end of the spectrum but still close to the middle. Just from that small bit of conversation, Dream could tell his accent was a bit stronger than George's. "I guess we should start from the beginning, right? Would you rather start chronologically according to his life or how we started building it? One's easier than the other."

Dream took a moment to think. "Um... I don't have a preference. Whichever one's easier."

"Alright, we'll start with what first got built here. Follow me." With that, Ponk took off sprinting to the left, gesturing towards a painting on the wall.

The painting had six people in the picture: George, and five other people he assumed were the builders. They sat around a table covered by a red and white tablecloth, all smiling in varying degrees at the camera (and one of them putting their middle finger up, to the seeming chagrin of the man in glasses taking the photo). A variety of dishes were set on the table. Everyone had a plate and a pair of silverware in front of them. Beneath the picture, all of their names were listed.

George smiled softly at the camera. God, his smile was so pretty.

"This was one of the first pictures we took as a group," Ponk said. There was a smile in his voice as he explained. "George and I went to visit the other crackheads in the States during the holiday times right after George graduated. So, we just invaded Bad's house. You can see his dog if you really look in the corner there."

He was right; there was a patch of blurry white in the bottom right corner of the picture. The only thing that could've been was a dog.

"We have a ton more pictures of that hangout," Ponk said. "We put the ones of George up on this wall."

Dream looked further down the wall, only to find more pictures. Ponk followed, silent.

In the first, George kneeled down next to (presumably) the same dog as before, his face broken into a bright grin as the dog was halfway through jumping onto his lap. He stood in front of a green background. Half of a black chair showed on the left side of the picture. Underneath the whole frame, somebody had placed a sign reading, "*George meeting Lucy!*"

The picture next to it had two people wrapping their arms around George: one with dark brown hair and glasses and the other looking away from the camera, his face too blurry for Dream to make out any significant features. George looked a tad awkward at the contact, but when did he not look a tad awkward at physical contact? Some things never changed. Dream smiled at that. The sign read, "*Bad, George, and Callahan being an idiot.*"

There were a couple more pictures after that, but none in particular caught his eye until the last one. A man wearing a white jacket and another woman with long blonde hair stood behind George, who sat in a chair in front of a computer. Even without high-quality graphics, the game on the computer was obviously a server in Minecraft (Munchy? Probably Munchy). Below, the sign read, "*Punz and Alyssa watch George suck at KitPvP.*"

But there was something stunning about how... relaxed George was, his shoulders fallen and his elbows resting on the armrest peacefully despite apparently playing KitPvP at the time. These were his friends, possibly his best friends in the world. And—And George, Dream had gotten to see George like that so much more now than before. Did that mean George held him as highly as Dream held George? And why Dream? They had only known each other for the better part of the year; he had probably been friends with the builders for years.

Dream meant something to him. He didn't know what exactly, but knowing that he meant at least a little bit—that was worth the world.

"Hey, so..." Ponk paused once they reached the other wall. "This is my little corner of the room. You'll see some of the others' corners if you look hard enough; it's a pretty big area. We were friends in real life, so mine's a bit bigger than the others."

The first painting in Ponk's corner was of George in an oversized black jacket grinning at the camera, the hand in front of his mouth doing nothing to hide it. His smile had always been too big, too bright to hide after all. Nothing had changed about that.

Ponk chuckled. "We took that at Winter Wonderland. Called out his name and snuck a pic to see if I could embarrass him in the group chat. But the guy just doesn't miss with photos."

Agreed, Dream thought, then the next painting had him burst out into a short fit of laughter.

Fucking George, crouching in front of a store sign making a peace sign with one hand and a high-five with the other. There was no shame on his face, no acknowledgement that this wasn't a normal position to stay in long enough for a picture. And was that a backpack on his back?

Ponk laughed along with him before explaining. "I don't even know how to justify that one. He just stopped me and told me to take a picture."

“Hey, at least it’s a good picture.”

“Yeah. Look, here’s proof that I’m taller than George.”

Dream examined the painting Ponk gestured to, but there was no noticeable height difference between the two. He squinted. Again, no observable height difference. Was he being pranked?

“That was on our Nando’s date,” Ponk said, a hint of nostalgia tinging his voice. “We went to Nando’s a lot, actually. It was like our thing.”

Dream’s heart jumped at that. He didn’t know why. “You guys were dating?”

“Oh, what? No. We both know George couldn’t pull anyone in real life if he tried. But I like to think George and I were brothers in a past life or something. It’s kind of ridiculous, I know, but...”
Ponk trailed off at that, seemingly deep in thought. They were doing that a lot today, huh?

Past life.

Dream wasn’t too much of a spiritual person, nor did he buy into the idea of reincarnation. But imagining a past life where he actually met George in person, gotten the chance to see who he was before tragedy struck... What would they have been like?

A question with infinite answers. Still, there was something about George that had prompted them to click together like a cap on a pen. It had taken some time to get to that point, but they had gotten there quickly enough for Dream to be comforted with the knowledge they’d probably still be friends if they had met in a previous life.

Or maybe a future life. Dream was the first to admit he didn’t know anything about the universe more than a plant or rock.

“... I miss him a lot,” Ponk said quietly. “I haven’t been to Nando’s or Winter Wonderland in years. It’s just... weird without George. Like there’s something missing, you know?”

“Yeah,” Dream said. His heart hurt. Why did his heart hurt? “Like something’s missing...”

They stayed in a thoughtful silence, unmoving in-game. What could Ponk be thinking right now? What purpose was this structure for anyway? Was it to be a reel of memories, a celebration of life, or a method of mourning online?

Or maybe it was a show of love to the only person who wasn’t around to see it anymore. Every detail of the structure, every builder who had invested their time into this—it was all crafted with a special kind of unreplicable, unfiltered love. Love for their friend, love for the memories they had shared together, love for the bond they had constructed so carefully over the years.

“I’m gonna get going,” Ponk said. “Feel free to stay as long as you want, okay?”

Dream nodded to that as the player leaving message popped up in chat. “Yeah. Thanks for talking to me.”

“No problem. That helped a lot more than you’d think.”

And with that, their Discord call ended, and Dream was left in the time capsule alone.

Then it clicked—why his heart had lurched at the thought of George having a boyfriend in his life, why he felt so warm with George around, why he had wanted to get along well with George’s past

friends, why life with George was so comfortable and the thought of life without him enough to petrify Dream into stillness. This whole time, he had—

Dream cackled as his heart bled onto the table.

Love. What an ironic word.

Who are they?

By the time Dream got a grip on himself and everything collapsing on him, it was one in the morning. He had been kicked from Munchy for inactivity and his body had somehow made its way onto his bed, but that had only barely registered. His mind was static, whatever thoughts he had drifting aimlessly through space, just high enough he couldn't pull any of them together to make a coherent thought.

A car passed by just next to the apartment. In the distance, an insect chirped. The night was overwhelmingly, oppressively still.

Dream looked out the window, only to be met with pitch darkness.

The world still moved on. Despite it all, the world still turned and time still ticked by, with or without him.

God. He needed to stop wasting what time he had left.

But everything felt off, not so far off-center he could identify what was wrong but slightly to the left. The atmosphere felt all wrong, like an imitation of itself. He was frozen on his bed with his heart pounding in his chest. It was cold, it was cold, it was *so cold* —

“George,” Dream called quietly. His voice was raspy, dry, and the name on his tongue was undeserving of such a voice. “George.”

There was silence, then a soft knock on the door.

“Dream?” came an even softer voice. “I don't mean to intrude. Would you like me to come in?”

Dream opened his mouth, but the words caught on his throat and clotted against themselves. They piled up like cars on a highway, and each one that got tangled in the mess pushed Dream closer and closer to the edge of the precipice.

He supposed the silence was enough of a confirmation, as the door creaked open and George stepped in.

He took a couple more steps into the room before taking a seat next to Dream on the bed. “Patches is sleeping on the living room chair right now, if you'd like to look.”

Dream shook his head but smiled at the thought of Patches curled up into a ball. His thoughts were obscured under a hazy cloud.

There was a moment when George paused to look him up and down, his eyebrows furrowed in worry. His gaze moved back to meet Dream's eyes. “Are you alright, Dream? You seem a little tense for it being one in the morning.”

Dream hesitated before nodding.

“Well, that's bullshit. I'm assuming you don't want to talk about it?”

Fuck. It wasn't that he didn't want to talk about it; his throat was too choked up to speak. But to be fair, what would he even say after everything that had crashed down on him?

Then George reached out to take his hand, and Dream's busy mind finally shut down.

The hand was a warm comfort. It wrapped around his own hand like a blanket, entangling with his fingers. But his heart—instead of twisting or jumping like it had with his previous crushes—only warmed with a fuzzy feeling unfamiliar to him. He struggled to rein in the urge to get closer, to get more warmth. George was already iffy when it came to physical contact; he shouldn't push it.

Then Dream looked up, only to find George smiling at him, not in that teasing, sarcastic smile he shot him when Dream tripped over the stupidest thing, but in the way a best friend would shoot their friend when watching them ramble about something they're excited about. In the way a friend looked at another friend when they're too busy entrenched in their passion to notice. In the way a partner would look at their dumbass partner in crime doing literally anything.

Love. That was love. What kind of love, Dream couldn't decipher just yet, but there was love in that gaze, and Dream melted underneath it.

"George," Dream called softly, the thorns in his throat receding.

And George must've felt it, too, because his smile grew just a bit gentler.

"Dream," George called back. "Let's go to sleep, okay? We can talk about it in the morning if you'd like."

His brain was on pause, but he could unpause it later when George wasn't looking at him like that. Dream flopped back onto his bed, his arm sticking up from George still holding onto it.

But just before Dream could let himself let go, George lied down next to him, keeping their hands intertwined. His wings fell gently over him like a blanket, his eyes fluttered shut, and Dream didn't think he had ever seen such an angel of a person.

Heh. Literally. It took everything he had in him to not start laughing at his own joke.

"Hey, Dream," George said, his eyes still shut. "Remember when you almost died in your sleep like an idiot?"

Dream cracked a smile at that. "I hate that I have to ask which time."

"The first time."

"The first time?"

"Yeah."

Of course Dream remembered that. He had never seen George so worried.

"Yeah, I do," Dream chuckled. His laughter died away as he filed through memories of the last couple of weeks, the last couple of months even. "I haven't almost died in a while, huh? Makes your job a lot easier."

George stilled, opened his eyes for just a tic, and looked Dream up and down. "Yeah. You haven't."

There it was, that expression he had when he was remembering something or thinking too hard. Dream frowned at that and asked, "What're you thinking, George?"

"We both know I never think. Go to sleep, you idiot." George left him with a soft kick to the leg before shutting his eyes.

Dream smiled at the kick and settled into the bed.

He would be kind to himself. He would allow himself this one moment of relaxation before hell broke loose.

And so Dream drifted to sleep, his mind finally rested for once in his life.

Morning didn't come easy.

Dream lifted his head, blinking the blariness from his vision away. His hand had separated from George's overnight, but George still sat beside him in the bed, humming as he pet Patches (who had most likely come in the bedroom demanding food. Prick). He tried not to feel too disappointed at the loss of contact. It was for the best anyway.

Then everything from the day before came crashing down on him.

"Good morning," George said. He lifted Patches into his arms. "Patches, it's morning. Scratch the shit out of your owner like a good kitty, will you?"

Patches gave him one last look before leaping out of George's arms and strolling out of the room. Seemed she was sick of both of them.

Dream chuckled at that despite the knotting in his stomach.

This was a good life, having George by his side. Dream had a partner now, both in his career ambitions and life in general, and he liked to think George liked the arrangement just as much as he did. There was someone to laugh with, someone to eat with, someone to celebrate with. Life wasn't lonely.

But he owed George more than that. If George had given his role as a guardian angel his all, Dream should give his all to help George reconcile with his past.

Even if that meant disturbing the peace they shared right now. Even if that meant turning the foundations of their friendship on its head.

(Not to mention his realization last night. That was being thrown straight out the window. That would never work out.)

"Hey," Dream called. "Are you open to talking about... well, you?"

And George didn't flinch away. He blinked but turned to face Dream. "What do you want to know?"

Well, the best place to start was someplace simple.

"I'm gonna list out some names. Tell me if you recognize them," Dream said. With that, he reached over to his phone on the nightstand (when had he moved it to charge his phone?) and scrolled through his Twitter DMs. "... Steven."

"No."

“Belinda.”

“No.”

“Joe.”

“Joe mama.”

Dream lowered his phone at that and wheezed, prompting laughter from George. “You’re so ridiculous. How about Alyssa?”

The laughter died away. The smile slipped off George’s face, and he looked away, staring off into the distance.

“George. Who was Alyssa?”

“I’m not sure what information I can tell you,” George said. “We met through mutual friends a couple years before I died. We played Minecraft together a lot. We did meet up once after I graduated with a bunch of our other friends, though.”

“Was she a close friend?”

“Of course. Like a sister. I remember, um...” George trailed off, his eyes flickering to the floor. “I don’t think I’m the sort of person people would go to for help. But I remember sitting in the TeamSpeak lobby and hearing her join the call, and we’d just greet each other before doing our work in silence.”

“Like every night?”

“Most nights during a busy season, yeah. I, um...” He rubbed his thumbs against each other, picking at his fingernails. “I regret—I *used to* regret a lot of things. I can think about my past life clearly now and I can appreciate it for what it was, but not saying goodbye to Alyssa—that’s one... that’s one thing I’d say I regret a lot.”

Dream frowned. Had George ever been quite this nervous? “George, that’s not your fault.”

George set his hands down and huffed. “I know it’s not. I still just wish I got the chance to say goodbye. Or just that she got the chance to say goodbye to me. That would be... nice, I suppose.”

“Nice?” Dream chuckled.

George grinned at that. “Listen, I can’t think of another word for it right now.”

“Okay, okay.” Dream scrolled down his Twitter DMs. “How about Punz?”

“Would it be cursed to say he’s my bro?”

“It would, but go ahead anyway.”

“Well, alright.” The smile slipped off George’s face again. “Um... I don’t quite know where to start. We met through mutual friends on MCPvP—you know MCPvP. After we became friends, we talked a lot about life in general. He had a job he didn’t like, I had a job I didn’t like, it was easy to commiserate over that.”

Dream nodded along as George kept speaking, tapping on Punz’s profile.

“Eventually, we both got out of our jobs,” George said, chuckling a little at that. “We celebrated together over Discord video call. We got drunk on champagne together. I think that’s the only time I shelled out the money to buy champagne. But, uh...” He looked back down at his fingers. “I hope he’s doing well—I reckon he’s doing well. Punz has a good head on his shoulders.”

“A hundred forty-five thousand followers on Twitter,” Dream said, holding up his phone.

A grin blossomed on George’s face, and he laughed. “Of course he does. I told you he has a good head on his shoulders. I knew he could do it. I’m—I’m...”

“Proud?”

“... Proud.”

Dream’s gaze flittered from George’s hunched back to his still fingers to his dull eyes. “You never told him that, did you?”

George’s entire body seemed to still, and Dream couldn’t help but think he looked closer to a statue than he did an angel. “No, I didn’t.”

There was nothing more to say about that. Dream moved on and said, “How about Callahan?”

George lightened up at that. “Callahan! He was an idiot.”

“Like you?”

“I hate you.” George continued even through Dream’s chuckles. “But yeah. We were something like coworkers on Munchy when we first met since we were both developers, even though he later became an admin and I didn’t. We never stopped being coworkers, but we became better friends over the years. Though I never heard him talk until we met up, the same meet-up after I graduated.”

“How does that even happen?”

“I’m not sure, actually. I do, um...” George laughed, but there was no humor in his voice. “I do wish I could’ve done more for him before I died. I was the lead developer on Munchy, but I never trained anybody to fill my position. Because, you know, I never planned to leave so early.”

Dream frowned as another uncomfortable silence fell over them. “Yeah. You didn’t plan that. Is that—”

“If you know about those three, then you probably know about Ponk.” The words streamed out of George’s mouth like a waterfall, tripping over each other on their way out. “I suppose I should talk about Ponk next. Again, we met online. You’ve probably noticed by now that I never left my house.”

“Heh, yeah.”

The attempt to lighten the mood with laughter went unnoticed, and George’s words were still frantic, almost frenzied. There was a new energy behind his voice, like a bus speeding straight into a wall, all its passengers screaming with the brakes. “We both lived in the UK, so meeting up was easy for us. We went to Winter Wonderland—you know Winter Wonderland—together every year. We went to Nando’s a lot together, too, especially while I was in university. We did a lot of stuff together actually. It was like—I don’t know. I don’t know a lot of things anymore.”

There was a stale silence after that, the kind of silence that would've been a death sentence to any conversation that wasn't this one and between any people who weren't Dream and George.

"How about Bad?" Dream asked quietly.

George raised an eyebrow, and if Dream hadn't spent enough time around him, he would think George was genuinely confused. "Bad? That's an adjective."

"You know who I'm talking about."

"I don't."

"If I know everyone else, why wouldn't I know Bad?"

"Stop it, Dream."

Those words were enough to put the conversation to a screeching halt. A pit of guilt burrowed in Dream's stomach as George turned away from him, every muscle in his body clenched and tense. His wings were raised almost like a shield against all the judgement of the world.

(But there was no judgement. There never had been.)

"Sorry," Dream murmured.

A moment passed before George let his wings fall to the side and his shoulders relaxed. He turned back to Dream with a blank face. "Don't be. It's not your fault. I just don't want you to think differently of me."

Think differently. What could have happened to instigate that response?

Then a whiny, elongated meow came from the kitchen, and the tension in the room burst like a balloon as they chuckled.

"Did you not feed Patches?" Dream asked, getting up from the bed.

George shrugged. "I only woke up a little bit before you did. I didn't have time before you woke up."

"Alright, alright. Get up, you boomer."

George huffed at that but took the hand Dream had offered him to pull himself off the bed.

As Dream poured food into Patches's food plate and George poured out stale water from her water bowl, Dream couldn't help but feel this was where he wanted to be forever.

Yet his heart sank as George cooed at Patches from the sink.

There was something George was guarding with all his might, guarding it even more protectively than he did Dream during his clumsiest stages of life. It was locked behind a wall of chains and a lock with no visible key, and George was intent on keeping its location a secret.

The only thing that would erode those chains was time. And fuck, Dream was never the best at waiting.

“It’s raining again,” Dream said.

There was a cloudy mist in George’s eyes as he nodded to that. “Yeah. It is.”

“Wanna play chess?”

Dream looked up from the program on his computer, only to see George standing in his doorway with a chess set in hand. He furrowed his eyebrows. “You sure? I’m pretty decent at chess.”

George rolled his eyes. “You sure don’t look it.”

“No, really.”

“According to who, yourself? As if that’s a reliable source in the slightest.”

“Fine, then,” Dream huffed, getting up from his seat. Somewhere in his head, he knew George was purposefully riling him up, but his reputation as a chess master in elementary school was at stake. How could the program be more important than that? “I’ll just have to show you then.”

And later if Dream kicked his ass in six consecutive chess matches, George would deny every moment of it.

Dream [19:33] new video soon

Dream [19:33] when the hell are you gonna upload yours

Sapnap [19:34] itll happen naturally dw king

Dream [19:34] flattery wont get you far sapnap

Dream [19:34] but it does get you somewhere so lmk when you upload

Sapnap [19:34] xD

Dream [19:34] stop using my own emojis against me

The sky was beautiful tonight.

With experience from the first video and George’s help programming, recording and editing the second video went by much quicker and smoother. Dream was on his YouTube channel page waiting for the video to render when George spoke after an hour of silence.

“You’ve made two of these cursed Minecraft videos so far,” George said. “How many more do you think you’ll do next?”

Nobody had asked him that before. And that unleashed the Pandora's Box of creativity Dream had kept hidden in his head for so long.

"I'm not sure about cursed Minecraft, but I do want to do more of them." Dream took a deep breath, pausing to let his mouth catch up with his thoughts. But his thoughts were running wild, finally free after years of captivity. He needed to wrangle them quick before they could escape. "There's this series I want to do—it's Unsolved Mystery. It's lowkey based off BuzzFeed Unsolved, except I look at mysteries in Minecraft. I've been working with some people online to see if we could recreate Pewdiepie's world seed. I've mentioned that to you, right? Surely I've mentioned it to you."

The look on George's face told him he had never, in fact, mentioned it to him, but he kept going, the stars in the night sky glittering so brightly he could almost, just almost touch them.

"The next step after that is—god, I don't fucking know, I guess challenges with coded plug-ins. Speedrunning Minecraft is simple enough, but what if there's someone hunting you down while you do it? What if you use Xray the entire time and can't turn it off? What if item drops are multiplied exponentially each time you break a block? Fuck, George, there's so much I've wanted to do for so long, and I'm just now getting around to it. What if I never—"

"Don't finish that thought."

The thoughts in his head froze. Dream's gaze shifted from the thousands of stars in the night sky to the infinite number of stars in George's eyes.

"You're beautiful," George laughed, his chuckles so quiet Dream had to strain his ear to hear them. "Your ideas, everything you have inside that head of yours—it's all so beautiful to me."

Dream grinned and sat a little straighter at that; it was an automatic response at this point. "Does that mean you'll finally say you love me?"

"No."

And it hurt, but Dream kept going. "You can call me beautiful but you won't say you love me?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh, come on now."

George's laughter softened into a fit of giggles, then when they faded away, he looked up at Dream with all the warmth in the world in his gaze. "You're gonna do great things, Dream. You really can do anything you set your mind to."

Dream opened his mouth to respond, but no words came out. George continued speaking.

"I used to make YouTube videos, you know that. A lot of my friends were, actually. But I was never really as passionate as you are about it. I mean, I loved it, don't get me wrong. But..." He smiled. "You know? There's a lot of people who aren't as passionate, as *creative* as you."

His heart was blooming too much. This was too much after what had happened that morning. Warmth was building behind his eyes.

"Even if I stole my title format from other Minecraft YouTubers?" Dream chuckled.

George smiled. "Even if you stole your title format from other Minecraft YouTubers."

They fell into another silence as they watched the video finish uploading.

Dream [23:43] hey

Dream [23:43] i love you

Dream [23:43] you idiot

Sapnap [23:45] i always knew you loved me

Sapnap [23:45] waiting for my kiss muah

Dream [23:45] no

Dream [23:45] but seriously

Dream [23:45] i appreciate you so much

Dream [23:45] so so much.

Dream [23:45] never forget that, ok?

Sapnap [23:45] dream

Sapnap [23:45] youre my best friend in the whole world

Sapnap [23:45] ily2 you idiot

Sapnap [23:45] im watching a movie with my sister dont make me cry

Dream [23:45] <3

Dream [00:12] hi mom

Dream [00:12] daily reminder that i love you

Dream [00:12] dont ask me why im still up

Dream [00:12] tell everyone else i love them too

Dream [00:12] can i visit tomorrow?

Mom [09:33] Clay! What did I tell you about staying up too late?

Mom [09:33] And of course you can, sweetie.

Mom [09:33] Mom loves you too!

Mom [09:33] You're always welcome back home <3

Mom [09:33] Your little sister says she won't let you back in if you don't bring food but ignore her, I'll let you back in >:)

Dream [09:34] thanks mom

Dream [09:34] tell her shes a rat <3

Our Friends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When the leaves of the trees outside wilted into a shade of orange and fell to the dirt, autumn had announced its presence. The wind was colder, louder, picking up strength as it continued on its journey across the world. But apparently Dream had missed the memo despite going outside to walk to work every weekday, because the arrival of autumn smacked him in the face halfway through October.

“Dude, it’s been October?” Dream said, running a hand through his hair as he leaned back in his seat. “When the hell did that happen?”

George shrugged and passed him a glass of apple juice. “It has been for a while. Where’ve you been?”

“Not reality.”

“I suppose that’s true.”

Dream’s gaze settled back on the computer in front of him.

Twenty-three videos uploaded to his channel. He had turned monetization on after six videos, and since then had his videos perform well. And while it hadn’t come as too much of a surprise considering how long he had spent studying the YouTube algorithm...

Having that much support from people was amazing, exhilarating even. Behind that number of subscribers he had accumulated was a real, living person who had decided they liked his content enough to click the subscribe button.

That was special to him. Really, really special.

Though of course, a special thanks to George with a smiley face was written under his socials in the description of each video. If there were comments asking who George was, Dream hadn’t seen them.

George took a seat in the chair beside him with his own cup of apple juice. “Your channel’s doing really well. Do you reckon you could quit your job and do this full time in a couple months?”

“Quit my job?”

“Yeah. You did say you hated it.”

Right. Going to work was still a chore.

Dream leaned back in his seat.

George and Punz had done it, right? Quit their jobs when their channels had grown enough? They had been happy enough to celebrate with each other over a Discord call, which was probably as scuffed as it could be.

They were happy. Dream could be happy following their route, too, and he’d be lying if he said that hadn’t been his ultimate plan all along.

“I’ll have to give it another month or so, yeah,” Dream said. He turned to George with a smile. “Thanks for helping me with everything. I still have a lot to learn from you, you know.”

Something shifted in George’s gaze at that. “You do?”

“Yeah. It’s like I’m learning something every day from you. It’s, um...” Dream chuckled, a habit he had when he was nervous. “Very epic.”

George burst into laughter.

Dream smiled despite it all. “Shut up. I couldn’t think of a better word.”

“Very epic indeed,” George eventually said when his laughter died away. “I’m happy you’re learning things, though. I just wish... I just wish we could’ve met in more optimal circumstances.”

More optimal circumstances. That could’ve looked like a lot of things.

Dream pursed his lips as he wondered about the possibilities that outnumbered the stars in the night sky in front of him. “Yeah. Me too.”

At the end of the night when Dream cleaned up their glasses, he saw George had only barely touched his apple juice at all.

Punz [00:14] you said you wanted to talk about careers and shit?

Punz [00:14] sry for the late response i was working on smth

Dream blinked against the harsh light of his phone in the pitch darkness of his room. This certainly was a time to be talking about such things, huh?

Dream [00:15] yeah

Dream [00:15] i was looking on the thing you wrote in munchy and i wanted to ask

Dream [00:15] how did you know when it was time to quit your job?

Punz [00:15] well thats a steep question

Dream [00:15] xD haha yeah ik sorry for asking so late

Punz [00:15] nah ur good let me think for a minute

Wow, that worked? Punz had actually put a memento of that moment in the 404 world?

Dream hadn’t explored everything yet; it was hard to gather up the strength to endure going through memories tainted with such intense emotions. He hadn’t returned since his first visit. Maybe Punz really had said something about it in that world. If it was significant enough to George for him to bring it up, it was probably equally as significant to Punz.

Punz [00:17] well youre on the right track

Punz [00:17] i may or may not have been keeping up with ur stuff on yt and your contents really good!!

Punz [00:17] a lot of my friends agree too

Punz [00:17] ur growth rate has been a giant wtf

Punz [00:17] youll definitely be able to like

Punz [00:17] support yourself monetarily from it all

Punz [00:17] but the hardest part about leaving was having to make my own schedule

Punz [00:18] hard to make yourself do something

Punz [00:18] have u been making all your content on a strict schedule?

Ah. That was a good point.

And he'd say he has. While he may have missed a couple days or a week, it wasn't like his idea list had run dry; in fact, it had only grown exponentially. He wasn't making as much content as he would've liked to, but that would certainly change if he quit his job.

Dream [00:19] yeah i think so

Punz [00:19] good bc thats the correct answer

Punz [00:19] if you know you can stick to that schedule long term, go for it

Punz [00:19] judging from what ive seen of you, youre the type to survive out there

Punz [00:19] theres no right time

Punz [00:19] you just gotta go for it

Punz [00:19] but personally i think you can do it

That was true. Deep down, Dream must have known there was no correct answer to that question. But hearing it from someone who was already established in the online world and someone who had no motive to lie to him—that was a weight off his chest he didn't know was there.

Punz [00:20] oh btw

Punz [00:20] sorry for like

Punz [00:20] threatening you the first time we dmed

Punz [00:20] i uh

Punz [00:20] dont even have a burner phone tbh

Punz [00:20] i just thought that sounded cool

Dream chuckled at that. What a dork. These were the people George had been friends with?

Dream [00:21] its cool man id be skeptical of someone new dming me too

Dream [00:21] thanks for the help

Dream [00:21] i know we dont really talk that much but

Dream [00:21] youre a cool person

Punz [00:21] nah dude youre cool too

Punz [00:21] lets talk more when its not midnight

Dream [00:21] hell yeah man

Dream [00:22] night bro

Punz [00:22] goodnight man

Dream shut his phone off and set it on the nightstand.

George had such a strange yet kind arrangement of friends. Dream had only had a couple conversations with everyone in that circle he had previously messaged, but they had always remained friendly, cordial. It wasn't hard to picture him messing around with them on Minecraft in a voice chat, grinning and bantering.

They loved him. Dream loved him. It was amazing how love could connect the world.

Dream shut his eyes.

Love. Love connected the universe and all the bands of stars that made it up.

Callahan [21:44] hey you mentioned something about doing minecraft parkour right?

Dream raised an eyebrow at the message that had popped up right as he booted up his computer. He had planned on recording a video while George had insisted on reading through an entire book in one night like an idiot, but...

Dream [21:44] yeah why

Callahan [21:44] we're doing an event on munchy

Callahan [21:44] parkour

Callahan [21:45] no reward but its just for fun

Callahan [21:45] its starting in like ten minutes if you want in

Parkour. He hadn't trained that in a while since figuring out what to do with his channel. And it would be fun anyway, right?

Dream [21:45] sure

Callahan [21:45] cool warp to event a when u get in

Dream logged into Munchy, pleasantly confused.

He had mentioned practicing parkour on old servers offhandedly during a sort-of-not introductory conversation with Callahan a couple weeks ago. Callahan had remembered that? And cared enough to let him know when an event was happening related to it?

George had had some good friends. Dream couldn't be happy for him.

And if he lost the competition at the very end from laughing too hard at something Callahan had whispered to him in chat, that was between them and them only.

After uploading a video, Dream found himself warping to the 404 world against his better judgement.

The world had been left exactly the way he had originally found it with the exception of a couple new item frames holding signed books in them.

Dream leaned forward, squinting at the screen.

Would it be appropriate to read through them? That was what they were there for, right? Preserving memories? Sharing George's legacy amongst the people who would understand the most? While he couldn't exactly speak for the others, Ponk had seemed all too happy to explain the

world to someone new.

That was the way Dream justified it to himself before popping one of the books out of the item frames and clicking to read it.

There was that time George and I racked up a good win streak on Skywars then threw right before we hit 100 bc he thought it would be funny.

Looking back, he was right. It was pretty funny.

*Signed,
Ponk*

Dream smiled as he placed the book back into the item frame. Looked like George's mischievous side hadn't changed much at all. He strafed to the side and grabbed the next book out of the item frame.

This man was the biggest hypocrite about horror movies ever. He always said he didn't like horror movies, but whenever one of us streamed one on Rabbit (rip Rabbit, am i right?) he laughed at the horror moments and made snarky commentary like that one asshole in the movie theater. What a fucking idiot.

*Signed,
Ponk*

Dream set the book back in the item frame. George and horror movies, huh? Dream wasn't too fond of horror movies either. He briefly wondered what George's deal with horror movies was before picking up the book beneath the previous item frame.

Ponk, we were watching a stupid old ghost movie that relied on jumpscares for horror. You really think anybody would get scared at that?

*Signed,
Alyssa*

The sad face printed on the sign beneath that item frame made him chuckle. But dwelling on that wasn't a good idea. He moved onto the next new book.

You guys ever notice how George was super smart but also the dumbest bitch alive? Man aced physics without revising at all and then walked into a pole because he couldn't be bothered to look up from his phone.

Yes, the purpose of this story was to remind everyone George walked into a pole. I have no regrets

*Signed,
Ponk*

Chuckles flooded out of Dream's mouth before he could stop them. George had always clowned on him for being clumsy during the earlier days of their friendship, but how could he say anything after walking into a pole? Dream's earlier crimes of tripping over nothing was nothing compared to that.

Dream placed the book back in its item frame right as the message popped into chat.

Ponk joined the game

Dream turned to face the Minecraft avatar that had spawned in next to him. Then Ponk's avatar

turned to face him.

<Ponk> oh hey

<Ponk> did you read the new stuff i added?

<Dream> only if i was supposed to

<Ponk> lmao i like that response

<Ponk> yeah this is just a space to share memories, u know?

Oh, thank god. He probably should've asked first, to be honest, but the thought of messaging someone first after maybe a couple lukewarm Discord conversations with them... No thanks.

<Ponk> holy **** did you read the one about the ghost movie

<Ponk> ugh i forgot this filter existed

Dream huffed out a laugh at both the filter and the ghost movie. He typed in a response, then leaned back in his chair as Ponk elaborated on the memory through chat.

Piecing together who George had been before his death had been an adventure so far. With every new testimony and every new description, another piece fit into the puzzle and Dream could picture the end result just a bit better.

It was just a bit painful, if he was being honest with himself. A puzzle could only tell so much. He'd never get to know the version of George they knew, and they would never get to know the version of George he knew. But maybe that was for the best.

... Should he even show this world to George?

George was a predictable person every way except emotionally. There was no telling which thing would draw a strong emotional reaction from him, which word would jab at him a bit too much. And given how distracted he had seemed the last couple of days... Fuck, had he even told George he was playing on Munchy?

Then there was the issue of how the builders themselves would feel. But Dream didn't know enough about them to be able to predict how they may feel about it.

So he sat back and smiled as he read Ponk's energetic retelling of memories in the chat, his heart fluttering just a bit as he imagined the George of the past.

And he wondered how he got to this point, falling in love with the George he knew now, yes, but falling deeper in love with the George he never got to meet.

How fun.

The text came early in the morning, earlier than Dream would've given credit to anyone he knew waking up.

Alyssa [08:12] hey can you help me with something? sorry to ask but nobody else is answering and alsjkdfla;

Well, he had some time to burn before work began. He began typing back.

“You texting your sister?” George asked, not looking up from cooing at Patches on the floor of the living room.

“Yeah,” Dream said back.

Huh. That didn’t sound all too weird, actually.

Dream [08:12] yeah whats up

Alyssa [08:12] ok um sorry sorry but

Alyssa [08:12] im was on the 404 world last night and

Alyssa [08:12] i dont know

Alyssa [08:12] i miss him a lot

Alyssa [08:12] i just woke up this morning and had this shitty feeling

Dream’s heart tightened.

George had been gone for, what, three years? He and his friends had been close, so incredibly close there was no way the grieving process was completely over. To be honest, he wasn’t certain the grieving process would ever be over.

He had always heard the grieving process to be something like a ball rolling around in a box with a pain button on one of the walls. The ball was giant at first, almost the size of the box, and almost continuously hit the pain button. It kept hurting and hurting and hurting until sometimes the pain controlled every thought and action. But over time, the ball would shrink in size and miss the pain button when it hit the wall. Of course, it would sometimes smack into it full force, but not as much as when it was as big as the box itself. The size of the ball would eventually dwindle to the size of a pin and it would hit the button less frequently, less harshly.

The ball never stopped rolling for a lot of people, so he heard. And that terrified him.

The thought of George leaving was petrifying, dizzying. Dream wasn’t unfamiliar with pain, but the thought of experiencing the same pain his friends had went through, having that ball smack into the button over and over and over until he had to surrender to the pain.

Maybe the ball had smacked straight into that button, or maybe it had just grazed it. Either way, there was only one person in the room who would know what to say.

“Hey, George,” Dream called, trying to keep his voice light. “What do you say to someone who’s missing someone else? Like, someone who’s not around anymore.”

George hummed at that, though his hand didn’t stop petting Patches. “There’s no right thing to say to that, really. How long has it been?”

“A couple of years. It was her friend.”

“Then...” He paused to think. His hand dropped to the floor despite Patches’s following meows of complaint. “I don’t know. I’ve been grieving, um... I suppose grieving myself for the past three years. There’s days when I’m completely fine, and there’s days when I wonder why everything had to happen to me and specifically me. But it definitely gets easier with time. Taking it one day at a time, knowing that these feelings are shitty but aren’t permanent, thinking through everything logically—that helped. That helps a lot.”

Dream’s gaze lingered on George before moving back to his phone. George had grappled with coming to terms with his own death, huh? God, how does somebody even begin to describe the

tragedy of that?

He typed, hoping the sentiment would carry over with the words.

Dream [08:15] its alright to miss him. its not a crime to feel things and to feel them strongly

Dream [08:15] youve already done well by taking it one day at a time, this is just another one of those days thats gonna feel like hell but youve been through it before

Dream [08:15] youve gone through a lot of pain to get to this point. this time, youve got experience and time on your side

Dream [08:15] the odds are in your favor

Dream [08:15] and the memory of george is too

Dream looked up from his phone and pursed his lips. "George, you good?"

"Yeah," George said. "Just remembering a couple of things."

"Bad things?"

"No. Good things. Things that make me smile."

And that was true. George was quiet but there was a smile gracing his lips as he moved to pet Patches again, who purred contentedly under his touch.

He was okay. They would be okay.

Dream turned back to his phone.

Alyssa [08:16] youre right

Alyssa [08:16] i just kinda really want to cry haha

Dream [08:16] thats alright

Dream [08:16] cry tears of sadness, tears of happiness at the memories, maybe something in the middle

Dream [08:16] youll be ok in the end

And they would be.

Alyssa [08:18] thank you

Alyssa [08:18] really

Alyssa [08:18] it was just feeling a little lonely around i guess

Dream [08:19] no problem

Dream [08:19] lmk if theres anything else i can do

Dream set his phone down and took a sip of water, his gaze moving to rest on George.

None of George's friends would react well to the truth. Not for now anyway. That would be his secret to keep.

Well, and Sapnap's. But considering midterms were soon, he probably wasn't giving too much thought to the existence of guardian angels.

... Fuck it. He had one life, and he wasn't gonna waste it on stupid bullshit.

"You ready to go?" Dream asked.

George raised an eyebrow at that. “You’re ready awfully early.”

“Yeah. I just wanna get moving. I’m turning in my two weeks’ notice today.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

“Yeah. I am.”

And he was.

Chapter End Notes

ball and box metaphor:

<https://twitter.com/LaurenHerschel/status/946887540732149760?s=20>

What happened?

Chapter Notes

I PULLED MY NECK TOO HARD AND NOW THERES PAIN ON ONE SIDE OF MY NECK AAAAAAA

cw: vehicle crashes

George was playing on a shitty laptop, and Dream was playing on a computer with his usual settings. Why was George still winning this stupid Minecraft sumo match?

“Get out of here!” George shouted, his frantic clicking and the excitement in his voice audible. “Get out! Let’s go, get him out of here!”

Dream burst out laughing. Fuck, his finger was slipping from his mouse. He needed to focus. “George, I’m right next to you, stop shouting in my ear—”

“Get out! Get out! Yes!”

There was more screeching and laughter from them for the next thirty seconds that sumo match lasted. Ultimately, George yelled out a victory scream as Dream sank into his chair, his abdomen aching from his hysterical laughter.

“You’re making me laugh too hard,” Dream whined, wiping a tear from his eye. A couple more chuckles escaped from his throat. “Screaming, like, ‘yes’ at the top of your lungs for no reason.”

George giggled at that as he typed in an invitation to another sumo match. “You have so many wins on this alt, Dream. I didn’t think you were this bad.”

“Oh, shut up, you only barely managed to win. I’ll beat you this match.”

And if Dream allowed his finger to slip from his mouse the next round just to see George happy again, that was his business and his business only.

Well.

Dream watched George as George bragged about his second win, listening but not processing the words. His heart strained.

This was getting to be too much for one person.

“Bro, you quit your job and you didn’t even tell me?”

“You uploaded a video and didn’t tell me.”

“Oh. That’s true...”

Dream rolled his eyes, chuckling along with Sapnap on the other end of the call.

It had taken far too long for Sapnap to upload his first video (which he begrudgingly admitted he laughed at and replayed for five minutes), but he supposed it had also taken him far too long to bite the bullet and put in his two week's notice. They had both been stubborn fucks to some degree.

Late October was a strange season. It was the weird middle ground between casual times and the holiday rush, the awful mix of chilly winds and oppressively hot sunshine, the tightrope walk of there still being over two months left in the year and the year almost being over. That was especially apparent now that Dream was walking through the city alone.

Actually, walking alone felt just as strange, if not stranger. George had always been by his side, always a shout away. It had mostly been out of necessity at first, but now...

Ugh. It felt weird. Though having George around for this conversation he was about to have with Sapnap would be even worse.

"Sapnap," Dream called, "I'm gonna tell you something, and you can't make fun of me."

"Um, I'm afraid you're gonna be disappointed, buddy."

"No, like. Actually."

Sapnap paused at that, and distantly Dream could hear the rattle of a collar and footsteps padding away. A door shut. "Okay, I'm alone now. No cats listening in on our conversation. What do you need?"

Suddenly, none of this felt like a good idea.

Dream's throat went dry. "Um... no, nevermind, it's nothing."

"Dream. Come on, I know something's bothering you," Sapnap said, his voice gentler than usual, softer than usual. "We've been friends for the better part of the decade. Nothing you say will freak me out at this point. You can tell me that you—"

"I think I'm in love."

"—have a piss kink."

Silence.

"Sapnap," Dream called before he devolved into a series of laughter.

Sapnap burst into a fit of hysterical laughter as well, slamming his fist against his desk. "Dude, I literally—oh my god, I was so sure that was what you were gonna—"

"Sapnap! What the hell?"

"I don't know!"

They stayed like that for a bit, Sapnap stuttering out justifications while Dream almost collapsed onto the sidewalk from laughter. Luckily, the streets weren't too filled, besides a man and his dog on the other end of the street moving to cross to the other side.

It was a beautiful night, actually. Why was nobody outside? Sure, it was ten in the evening, but that was hardly late compared to how long some people stayed up. Stars glittered in the night sky,

light pollution struggling to obscure it but its beauty shining through nonetheless. It was a full moon tonight. Even with the paltry lighting from the streetlamps and windows, it was visible in all its glory.

Dream's heart lurched.

George would love this. George would stop at the street corner and gaze up at the stars with his eyes glittering just as brightly, gasping that gentle gasp of his and grinning while pointing out something Dream had never noticed before.

God, he had seen him just an hour ago, and he already missed him.

"Anyway," Sapnap said, clearing his throat. "You think you're in love."

Dream could only laugh at that.

"Dream, you're laughing that way you laugh when you know you're caught doing something. I'm gonna assume you're actually in love."

"No way. It's just... a tiny crush. As tiny as you." Even if he knew he was lying about that, that didn't mean he would miss a chance to make fun of his friend.

"Why don't you tell me about them?" Sapnap paused. "Fuck you, by the way."

Dream chuckled, his smile only growing wider when he recalled George. There was no fluttering of his heart, no stomach doing somersaults in his body—only a kind of warmth he had never quite felt before. Was he supposed to have those? This was new. "I... don't really know how to describe it."

Sapnap's voice lightened at that. The smile in his voice was evident. "Try your best then. Doesn't need to be perfect."

"Okay, um..." Really, there were no words that could describe everything he was feeling. His best would never be enough. "He's... very important to me."

"Duh."

"Shut up. He's just, like... okay, well, he's handsome, first of all," Dream said. "He's smart, he's kind, he's wonderful. I know that's a shitty description, but I really can't think of the words to describe it all."

Sapnap hummed at that. "That is a pretty shitty description. How is he smart?"

Well, that was a no-brainer.

They spent the next half hour talking, Dream unloading everything he knew about George while Sapnap listened to it all. Occasionally he would chip in and ask leading questions, but Dream had mostly been free to jump from topic to topic, trait to trait.

It was freeing. Being able to speak about it felt like a weight lifted off his chest.

"Dream," Sapnap said, "sounds like you're in love."

He was. There was no arguing against it anymore.

"I am," Dream affirmed.

“Then is...” Sapnap sighed. That wasn’t a good sign. “Listen, Dream. I need you to answer this honestly. You can tell me anything.”

Dream’s heart fell. “Um... sure.”

“The person you’re talking about—Is it George?”

Dream froze.

Sapnap paused before speaking again. The one time he was thinking before speaking, Dream wished he wouldn’t. That meant this was serious. “So it probably is. What’s wrong with loving George?”

“There’s nothing *wrong* with it,” Dream said. “It’s just... I don’t know, it’s the first time I’m really feeling something like this, and it’s for the person I’m with all day.”

“Even better. You know that roommates vine?”

Dream had to laugh at that, but the situation sunk in once again and his smile faded. “Well, there’s that entire situation with George being, um...”

“... Oh, yeah. That’s an issue.”

They stayed in silence, Dream leaning against a lamppost while Sapnap probably leaned back in his chair.

“You should tell him,” Sapnap eventually decided to say.

Dream shook his head.

George was stuck with him for an indeterminable amount of time. He didn’t want to make that time awkward. Even if George miraculously felt the same way and somehow Dream didn’t wreck their friendship, relationships between two humans were hard enough. How would a relationship between a human and an angel work?

“No, seriously,” Sapnap said. “You don’t need to be in a relationship, and George isn’t the type of person to back away from a friendship because of something like that. Nothing needs to change.”

“Something’s gonna change.”

“It won’t if you don’t want it to.”

Dream stayed silent.

Sapnap scoffed. “Don’t go quiet on me. Listen, Dream, you’re actually so in love with this guy. If you keep your feelings to yourself, you’re gonna explode.”

God damn it. Sapnap was right. If Dream had felt this strongly about just telling Sapnap about his feelings, he wouldn’t be able to stand stewing in his own feelings for much longer.

“... You’re right,” Dream grumbled.

“Hell yeah, I am. Now go home with a bouquet of roses and wine n’ dine that bitch! You can do it!”

“Fuck off.”

“Bark! Woof!”

“Why are you like this?”

Sapnap laughed. “Really, though, tell him on your own time, and let me know how it goes. I know I clown on George all the time, but you’re both, like, my favorite people.”

Dream’s heart tightened. *@georgenotfound is my favorite person.*

“I’m rooting for both of you, okay?”

“Yeah,” Dream said. His throat felt dry, but his heart felt lighter, like it could spring again.

“Thanks, Sapnap.”

“Anytime.”

They spent the rest of the night talking, jumping from Dream’s YouTube channel to Sapnap’s college material to anything imaginable. Eight years of friendship, and they had never run out of things to talk about. Dream appreciated that.

When Dream returned home, there was a smile on his face.

A week had passed since his talk with Sapnap, but the tight feeling in his chest whenever he thought about speaking up had only grown more intense.

“Dream, look,” George snickered, pointing at a bird on the street. “It’s a chonker.”

Dream held a hand over his mouth to stifle his laughter. George was hellbent on making him laugh and look bad in public, wasn’t he?

It was the evening after Dream uploaded a video when George had had the bright idea of taking a walk together on the streets in the afternoon. Despite the month being early November, the Florida afternoon sun was still unreasonably blistering hot. Dream supposed he should’ve warned George of that before taking the first step outside, but seeing as how George probably wasn’t affected by temperatures as an angel, he doubted it would’ve made a difference.

There were more people today than there was that night. The high schoolers had just been released from class, some choosing to hang out with their friends in the city while others opted to ride the buses home. Several adults running errands were scattered in the streets, and other adults walking dogs. Distantly, Dream wondered how many among this mass of people had watched one of his videos.

There were too many people, though. They should probably go somewhere Dream could actually respond to George.

“I never noticed how chonky of birds you have over here,” George said. “Then again, I never really went outside, so maybe I never noticed.”

Dream shot him a quick smirk.

George scoffed, rolling his eyes with a smile.

Dream pulled out his phone and held it up to his ear. “Hey, dude, I’m gonna go on the bus. You don’t have to go on it with me, but I want you to meet me at the south edge of the city.”

“That’s fine with me,” George said. With that, he disappeared into the crowd.

It felt a bit colder now.

A couple minutes passed before a bus finally arrived at the bus stop. Dream climbed on, paid his fare, and moved to grip a pole.

The bus wasn’t packed by any means, but it was still uncomfortable being around this many people. He recognized a couple of the teenagers from the local high school giggling with each other. In the front half of the bus, other people had their earbuds in and heads down to stare at their phones. That seemed like a good plan.

Dream opted to look out the window instead.

Cars rushed by quick enough for Dream to flinch when they passed by. The drivers around his area were getting bolder and bolder, huh? The public transport buses weren’t any better, it seemed. There was a frightening amount of traffic for this time of day. Then again, it was autumn. Business always began to ramp up around this time of the year.

Then the bus jerked to the left as it turned, prompting Dream and a couple other standing people to stumble.

“What the fuck?” somebody whispered to themselves.

What the fuck, indeed. He didn’t remember bus rides being this abrupt.

There was an air of annoyance now, but all Dream could feel was uneasy. Something didn’t feel right about this. Fuck the fare, he should get off at the next stop. But how far away was the next stop?

The bus jerked again, and the bus driver cursed underneath their breath.

Dream’s skin prickled. His mind felt fuzzy. Had it always been this warm in the bus?

His mind processed the next three things at the speed of mud.

The bus driver swerved to the side, probably to avoid the oncoming obstacle that was the wall of cars ahead of them.

There were more cars in that direction. That movement had been futile.

George was still waiting for him.

Dream should have seen this coming.

Then he blinked, and disaster unfolded.

Dream clung to the pole and screwed his eyes shut, screams wrapping around him as the sound of broken metal pierced his ears.

Then a pair of arms and something softer surrounded him like a shield. It deflected every sound, everything gone wrong with the world, until Dream was left listening to his breathing and the rhythm of his heartbeat.

He wrapped his own arms around the figure. He wanted to stay here forever, but reality would come knocking anytime soon.

“Dream,” came a sob. “Dream, you idiot.”

He recognized that voice.

Dream paused, then quietly called, “George?”

“Dream.”

“Hi, George. I’m okay.”

“I hate you so much.”

“I’m fine, George.” He held onto the name like a lifeline. “I’m ready to see the world now.”

“No.”

“George. I have to see it eventually.”

George stiffened before releasing him and falling back.

Dream opened his eyes.

Smoke. Smoke smeared across what should have been a clear blue sky. The sun shined down on them. There were skid marks in the grass where cars had swerved and crashed. Cars were scattered like trash on the road. What was otherwise a perfect day to be outside had turned into a bitter mockery.

People were in the midst of evacuating the bus, the bus driver having twisted open the overhead door. A couple bystanders were on call, and more people stood to the side. A woman leaned against another person as she held her leg close to her. At least people were caring about each other now.

There was still a ringing in his ears. Nothing else was wrong with his body. George really had protected him from everything.

911. He needed to call the police.

Dream moved to take his phone out of his pocket. It hadn’t even been cracked. He dialed a number and waited.

“... 911, what’s your emergency?”

“There’s been a crash on the road,” Dream said.

“Which road was this on?”

Dream stayed seated as he answered all of the questions asked to him. His gaze moved to George.

George was kneeled on the floor, his head facedown and his arms covering any hope of seeing his face. His wings surrounded him, and never before had Dream thought he looked like more human than he ever had before.

Dream reached out to set a hand on George’s hand.

They stayed like that until the police call was finished.

There were minimal injuries at the scene, from what Dream had heard from an EMT on the scene. The woman from before had sustained a broken leg while the driver had fractured his ankle. Another couple of people had broken an arm, but everyone had evaded death for another day. After being checked by another EMT, Dream had opted to walk home with George by his side, neither speaking a word.

And really, what was there to say after that? After Dream had brushed fingertips with Death again? It was a miracle no one had died in what had ended up being a more awful crash than it seemed from inside the bus.

At least, on George's side. Dream had a million words buzzing around in his mind, but catching enough to form a coherent sentence was an arduous task.

He was supposed to feel something after this kind of incident, wasn't he? Anything other than this crushing emptiness and replay of everything that had happened earlier that day.

It was evening by the time Dream had unlocked the door to his apartment and walked in, leaving George to close the door as he sat down on the living room couch. George took a seat at the other end of it.

The clock ticked.

That had been a warning, hadn't it? A warning from Death, a threat that if he didn't take risks, if he never grabbed life by the throat and throttled happiness out of it, he'd never get the chance to again.

He had already quit his job and picked up a promising career on YouTube. He had already reached out to the people he wanted to connect with. What the hell was stopping him from taking one final step towards his happiness?

"... George," Dream called. This was it. If he didn't say it now, he never would. His heart was pounding now. "I've wanted to tell you something for a while now. I know this isn't really an optimal time, but if I don't say it now, I never will."

George didn't respond.

Dream continued anyway, knowing he was listening. "I know I'm alive and you're, well, not, but..."

Fuck. This was so hard. Why was it so hard?

"I think—No, I'm pretty sure." Dream turned his head, finally having mustered up the courage to face George. His heart threatened to burst into a million pieces, but ultimately, finally, he said, "I love you, George."

He was met with silence.

Something warm was building behind his eyes. That was okay. "I just... it's okay if you don't feel

the same way. I needed to let you know, though. I love—”

“No,” George said, his voice strained. “You don’t get to say that to me. Not until you know what kind of person I really am.”

Dream frowned. “What? We’ve been tied together pretty much every hour of the day for the better part of the year now.”

“Dream, no, you have something better ahead of you, something better than me.” His words were rushed now, almost panicked. “Hell, I’m not even alive anymore, Dream. You can’t—I’m not the person you think I am.”

What did that mean? What the hell did that mean?

Dream winced. His head was foggy now, and he felt he would collapse at any moment. “George? What do you mean?”

God, his voice sounded so small. He sounded scared. What was happening?

George looked up, and finally, Dream had a clear image of his watery eyes and fraught expression. “Dream, do you remember what I told you about the requirements for people to become guardian angels?”

That required a bit of digging through his memory. He shoveled through piles and piles of memories before finally coming across the one George was prompting him to recall.

“That... that there’s a couple things in common between you and the other guardian angels?” Dream asked.

George nodded. “More specifically, we’re supposed to have two things in common.”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. Supposed to?

“One, we all died with regrets tying us back to Earth. If you want examples of what I mean, it’s not my place to tell you. And two...” George stopped.

“... George?”

George shook his head. “Two, everyone else died in a protective way, like taking a bullet for someone else or dying to protect another life. I, um... I didn’t die that way. I’m not supposed to be a guardian angel.”

What the fuck.

“Judging by the look on your face, I think that needs a bit of clarification, so...” George cracked him a sad, miserable smile, his eyes glistening. “Let me tell you about the day I died.”

Your Death

Chapter Notes

cw: discussion of a vehicular accident

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You already know this, but I died three years ago, almost four years ago now. My best friend was visiting me in London at the time. He was in the country for a couple days for some sort of event. I don’t even remember it anymore. It seems so long ago.

“Everything happened on the last day, I think. It was a rainy day, and I’m already not very well known for going outside. But my friend—he’s the type of person who doesn’t like to sit still, the type of person who always needs to be working on something to feel satisfied with himself. He was very kind to the world and to everyone around him. I guess that’s why he bugged me to go outside with him in the rain so much.

“It was fun, though, for those first few hours in the rain. I remember we walked all over the city, me yelling after him when he ran out from underneath the umbrella. I was the one holding it, and I didn’t wanna be standing next to some wet, stinky person, you know?”

Dream had to chuckle at that. George’s smile brightened as he continued talking, hundreds of memories flashing by in his eyes.

“It was really fun. I think my life only got better as I grew up. That was when I had the freedom to just go out and do whatever I wanted, and I wasn’t rich or anything, but I had the funds to do most of the things I wanted to do. My friend was the same way, too, though he was a tad older than me and was more settled in life.”

Huh. Nobody Dream had spoken to mentioned going to the UK to visit George. The only meet-up he had been told of was the large hangout in the US.

“How’d you two become friends then?” Dream asked. Maybe that might clear something up.

“Oh, he was looking for developers for his Minecraft server. I applied, and I guess I stood out to him or something, because we talked a lot one-on-one after he accepted me as a developer and played a ton of Hunger Games together. Like, a *ton* of Hunger Games.” George laughed, looking up at the ceiling as if he were peering back into the sky, trying to see through all its secrets. Thousands of memories flashed by in his eyes. “But what really brought us together was computers. He didn’t really code while my job was coding. I didn’t really get involved in hardware, but he loved that kind of stuff. He straight up offered to build me a computer when mine was dying. It was kind of meant to be, you know?”

Dream cycled through the names in his head. Punz, Alyssa, Ponk, Callahan. None of them matched the description. Who was this? He felt like he should know.

“I miss him a lot,” George said, his voice quiet. He shifted his gaze back down to the floor, and the brightness that had been present on his face darkened to dull. “I, um... I guess I don’t really get to miss him, though.”

Again with the cryptic wording. What did that mean?

“So, on the day I died,” George said. The words seemed heavy, like they were weights too heavy for him to lift. “Well, it was on the last day of that London trip. We somehow hadn’t boarded a double decker—you’re familiar with what that is, surely—the entire time, and he said he didn’t want to go back without having boarded one. It was raining, so of course I agreed. Though looking back, maybe I shouldn’t have.

“We waited at the bus stop for a couple minutes. Or an hour. I never really had the best grasp on time, and when you’re with your best friend, time goes by way faster than you think it does.

“When the bus finally came, he was so ridiculously excited,” George said with a grin. “I know you Floridians don’t really have double deckers, but I didn’t think he’d get so excited about it. He was smiling and laughing and everything. We went on the top floor and just... looked at the world.”

His grin softened into a warm, soft smile, millions of memories flashing by in his eyes. “It’s a bit sobering, to be honest. That experience of looking out at the world and seeing people pass by with the rain pittering on the windows—that’s unforgettable. That’s a level of calm I’ve never seen in my life. Well, my living life at least.

“We just stayed on the bus for a while after that, watching the world pass by us. I don’t think we spoke to each other on that entire bus trip. I appreciated that. I hope he appreciated it too. I don’t regret not speaking, but I do wish...

“Well. I suppose I shouldn’t talk about that.” George pursed his lips and frowned. Whether he was frowning at the world or at himself, Dream couldn’t tell. “The only time we spoke to each other on that bus aside from that entire beginning part was when, was when... was...”

Dream’s throat tightened at the way George’s body tensed. “George, you don’t need to—”

“No, I do. I need to.” George paused, but his voice was strained. “We were at the front of the bus, and I just... got that feeling, that awful feeling when you know something awful’s about to happen but you know you can’t do anything about it. I saw it, you know. I saw that we were about to crash into the bus ahead of us. So I—So I...”

George sighed. His body slumped over, and he looked smaller than he ever had before. He had transformed from the George he knew now to the conflicted, torn angel that had fallen from the sky all those months ago.

Dream reached out to set a hand on George’s shoulder, but George snapped away.

George crossed his arms, his muscles so much tenser than he had ever seen them before. Billions of memories flashed by in his eyes, all of them shattered into as many pieces as there were stars in the sky. “I, um... My body acted quicker than my mind did. All I could think about in that moment was him—where he was, where he was looking, if he would survive something like this.

“He was still looking out of the side window. Everything was still normal to him; it was just a normal day to him. As far as he knew, everything was still as fine as the entire trip had been up to this point, and he was happy—he was happy! I... I wanted to protect that.”

“So, I, um...” George frowned and glared at the ground. “I moved in front of him and pushed him back. I don’t know why I thought that’d be enough to protect him at the time. A crash of that caliber must’ve had more casualties than just me. But uh...” He paused after that for some time, his eyes glazed over and dull. Shards of broken memories were scattered everywhere. “Yeah. I

don't remember what happened after that. I think I died."

That was a strange way of phrasing it.

"You think you died?" Dream said.

"Yeah. That's the last of my memories. I don't really know what happened to him either, if he lived or died. That's why I'm not supposed to be a guardian angel, Dream. I couldn't protect him." George's voice was quiet at the end of that, quieter than a tear dropping onto the floor. He had nothing left to say, and judging by the way he had his wings curled around him, he didn't want to say anything further.

But that wasn't right, was it?

As far as Dream knew, all of George's closest friends had been on that special 404 world: Punz, Alyssa, Ponk, Callahan. But none of them were dead. Nobody had indicated throughout their conversations that they had ever been involved in an accident, even less so that they had personally been with George when he died.

There was one person he was forgetting though, someone Dream hadn't met yet. That was—

"Hey," Dream called. Was this a good idea? Almost certainly not. But it was the only option he had left. "About your best friend... was his name Bad?"

And this time, George had nowhere to run and nothing to hide. The truth was already out anyway.

He stayed silent.

"George."

"You know the answer."

That was true.

"I'm—" Dream chuckled despite himself. "George, he's alive."

George's body tensed.

"George! He's alive!" Dream leaned forward and held his hand out in front of George's hand. His heart raced—whether it was from George or the sudden revelation, he would never know. "You saved him, George. Just like how you saved me all those times."

George took his hand, his grip both firm and uncertain. He set his wings back just far enough for Dream to see his face. And his face was blotched pink, his eyes watery but not yet to the point of tears. "I—I didn't. The entire thing was my fault anyway. I wouldn't be surprised if he never wanted to think about me again."

Dream's heart ripped at the guilt and shame written on his face. Those emotions didn't belong on George's face. "George, how could it be your fault? If anything, you're probably the reason he's still alive."

George remained bitterly silent.

Dream offered him a smile and squeezed his hand. His heart lurched when George squeezed back. "No, I know. Let me show you something."

George leveled an uncertain look at him but stood up with him, their hands still connected. They walked to where Dream's computer slept and sat down in their respective seats. It was a familiar enough routine.

Dream ran his finger across his keyboard to wake up his computer before logging onto Minecraft and subsequently Munchy (though he didn't fail to notice how George's grip on his hand tightened). Time ticked by slowly as the screen loaded.

"George," Dream said quietly as he scrolled to the golden helmet. He watched George's eyes widen when the numbers "404" faded into existence above the hotbar. "Look. Do you remember this?"

George's following laugh was stifled, but he laughed nonetheless. Some of the tension in his body dissipated. "Oh my god, I haven't seen that in a while. Yeah. Bad and I were testing the cross-server inventory system Callahan set up before that. Bad asked me what he should test it with, so I just gave him a golden helmet. I didn't know he still remembered that."

"Well, watch this then."

Dream right-clicked, and the world loaded into view chunk by chunk. He released George's hand and moved his character back to the front of the room before sliding the mouse and keyboard closer to him. "Take a look."

George slowly, hesitantly took the controls, then mumbled to himself as he read each sign. "You're my favorite person. Love you. Rest. To my friend, to my brother, to George. Rest now, George. You're the best part of me. You've done enough. Rest now, my friend."

Then he fell silent.

Dream took his hand again.

"Best friends," George said, his voice strained and his eyes shiny from tears yet to come. "Always, forever. I love you. From... From Darryl."

Those billions of memories—they gravitated back towards each other, reconnecting seamlessly.

"He remembers me," George said. "He's not mad at me!"

Dream offered him a warm smile as George stared at the screen. He spoke softly, careful not to burst the aura of awe that had formed around George. "You know, this entire world—all of this was Bad's idea. He made all of this for you, to commemorate your life." He set a hand on George's shoulder. "You're so loved, George, even after death. By me, by Bad, by everyone who worked on this world, and by everyone you've touched the lives of. You're still so important to them, to *me*. You've changed lives. Don't ever think you weren't supposed to become a guardian angel. I think that's a role fitting for someone who was so warm and kind in life."

George looked around the Minecraft world, then took his hands off the controls, his chest rising and falling along with his happy laughter. But now tears were free to stream across his face, and he fought to gasp for air.

"George?" Dream called, turning to face his entire body towards him.

George leaned back in his seat and took hold of Dream's hand with the brightest, yet simultaneously saddest grin he had seen from him. "Dream. Dream!"

“Yeah?” Then Dream’s heart fell. “Wait, are you mad I knew about this?”

“Dream...” George laughed again and wiped his eyes with his other hand. “No, I understand why you did. I don’t think I would’ve reacted well if you told me before now. It wasn’t the right time then. But...” He looked up at Dream with shimmering eyes. “It’s funny. I’ve known everyone on this server for years and years and years. I miss them so much, but it’s not painful. I just realized it hasn’t been painful in a while. You know why?”

“Why?”

“Because of you.”

Those words took his breath away. George continued speaking regardless.

“Being around you feels so natural I forget I’m not alive sometimes. When I’m with you, I forget about everything bad that happened to me throughout all those years I was dead. All those people I had been assigned to in the past, everyone I knew in my past life—I’ve always been told I was a sort of unpassionate person, but something about you makes me feel things so much more deeply than I ever had before. You just—you’re an inspiration to me, Dream. And... And—” George cut himself off to laugh and rest his head on Dream’s shoulder. He gazed up at Dream, and finally, Dream recognized that emotion in his eyes.

“I love you,” George sighed like it was the easiest thing in the world to say. And maybe for him, it was. “I love you, Dream.”

And that was the final punch that knocked all the wind out of Dream’s lungs.

George chuckled. “Come on, I didn’t say all that embarrassing stuff to get radio silence.”

“You...” Dream’s mind short-circuited. Every process his brain used to figure out what to say next, how to respond—George had single-handedly shut them all down. Adrenaline crackled underneath his skin as if he was set on fire.

“You’re such an idiot,” Dream laughed as something warm built behind his eyes. “I just... George.” The imminent tears broke into a waterfall as he cried into a hand. “I love you. I love you so much.”

“Dream.” George’s voice was breaking now. “Come here.”

Dream melted into George’s touch as he wrapped his arms and wings around him. He flung his own arms around George, pulling him as close as he could.

They stayed like that for a while, shielding each other from the realities of the world. Whether their tears were from celebrating newfound revelations or from mourning the past and what could’ve been, Dream didn’t know. He couldn’t. But Dream knew this was where he felt safe; George was his home. And he hoped, no, *knew* George felt the same way.

Come morning, they awoke in each others’ arms.

Chapter End Notes

george's story isnt entirely clear yet. thats intentional. emotional people kinda make

shitty storytellers D: (including me!) theyll talk more about what happened in the next chapter. bear with me, and apologies.

Move

Chapter Notes

hi im going to college

[fanart by ShadowUndertale0 here!](#)

btw to heavenstruck crew on twitter, i see you guys and i really appreciate ur support ;-
; wasnt sure if specific people were ok with being mentioned and i dont have a fandom
specific twitter to ask, but ily guys, thanks for all the kindness <3

The transition from friends to something more undefinable had been surprisingly fluid. Dream supposed that was what happened when best friends became something else.

“Wow, they’re just gonna forget about the dead guy they just saw?” George snorted, pausing to eat a spoonful of rice.

Dream’s gaze stayed glued to the television screen, but he hoped his disappointment was apparent even without an annoyed sigh paired with it.

Neither of the two had stopped to take a breather from life until this week. Even after quitting his traditional job, keeping up with YouTube was more taxing than Dream initially thought it would’ve been, from scripting all the way to publishing. And George—honestly, Dream didn’t know what George was up to. The only evidence he had of George’s frantic work was random strings of code on his desktop when he woke up in the morning. Sometimes it made sense, sometimes it didn’t. It was George’s business anyway; Dream didn’t try to decode it.

Now, life was slow again, even if just for this one peaceful moment of sitting down to watch a movie and eat dinner together.

Well, “dinner” was a strong word for leftover takeout. And “peaceful” was a strong word for whatever was happening now.

“I’m just saying,” George said, “they come across a corpse and immediately—oh, what? Where’d they go?”

Dream felt his jaw clench. “Maybe you’d know if you stopped talking over the movie.”

“Why’re you complaining? There’s subtitles right there.”

“Then you should know what’s going on.”

“What, you expect me to be able to read?”

Okay, Dream had to smile at that. And judging by the smirk on George’s face, George knew he already won. Prick.

“Wait, who’s that guy?” George asked, furrowing his eyebrows at the screen.

The man’s name was on the screen. The man’s name was literally on the screen. But George sounded way too genuine to be asking to annoy him. What was happening? Was George truly this

blind or was he just trolling?

God. This was the man he loved.

Dream took a deep breath. “That’s the main character, George. You know, the guy we’ve been following around for the last hour.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes, really.”

George hummed curiously at that, and Dream felt his heart melt just a bit.

(Only a bit though. The rest of his sins were unforgivable. At least, that was what Dream told himself after he caught himself smiling too fondly at George’s stupid questions.)

Working on a laptop wasn’t optimal, but it beat sitting at his computer all day. That counted as a change of scenery, right? Moving from his bedroom to his living room?

Well, he would count it so anyway. From the spot on the couch he had curled up in, he could see Patches lying flat on the floor, most likely pretending to be asleep like the mischievous idiot she was. The blinds weren’t shut yet; the taller apartment complex just across the street radiated blocks of light from certain sections of windows, and Dream couldn’t help but wonder what the rest of the world was up to.

Dream set his gaze back onto his laptop, humming to himself as he browsed through the Minecraft category on Twitch.

Minecraft could be lonely at times, especially while speedrunning. He hadn’t ran through the game in a while, now that he thought about it. His time had been consumed by George and setting up his channel.

Mostly George. Dream reminded himself of that with a smile.

And speak of the angel, a familiar weight pressed into his side.

“What’re you doing?” George murmured.

“Looking at streamers,” Dream said. “Not a lot of people are doing speedrunning. Should I start?”

“Are you blind? There’s a speedrunner right there.”

“Well, that’s Illumina. He’s built different.”

George chuckled at that. “If you say so. But do what makes you happy. If you want to give it a shot, I don’t see the harm in it.”

Dream paused.

George said it as if it was so easy. George’s time as a mortal on this planet was already up; he had no fear of consequences or failure.

But it really was that easy, wasn't it? Dream had already broken the fear barrier when he created his channel for everyone to see. He smashed the broken pieces of that barrier every time he posted a new video. Livestreaming on a Twitch channel would just be an extra middle finger to everything that had stopped him in the past.

Fuck. George was right. Why was he always right?

"I'm right, aren't I?" George said with a smug grin.

"Maybe," Dream said. He turned towards George, raising an eyebrow upon seeing a space where his wings should've been. "Human form?"

"Yeah. Was wondering if this felt any different when I'm in a body than when I'm not."

"Verdict?"

George paused to curl up closer to him, and Dream couldn't help but think he resembled a cat. "I dunno. You're not an overly hot or cold person."

"So you're saying I'm not hot?"

George shrugged at that. "I guess so, yeah."

Dream sighed as George snickered like the bastard he was, biting back a grin at that. "You're so stupid. I can't believe I love you."

"But you do, so who's the real idiot here?"

Dream rolled his eyes and leaned back into his seat. "Whatever. What do you wanna watch?" He tilted his laptop to face George.

George scrolled through the Minecraft category, then paused to tap on one livestream with an odd smile on his face. "I always told Bad to stream on Twitch instead of YouTube. I never knew he actually did it."

Wait, what?

Dream turned the laptop towards him, only to see the page on a livestream by someone named BadBoyHaloIsLive.

Huh. That name sounded awfully familiar.

"Is that your friend?" Dream asked softly. "Bad?"

George nodded with a giggle. "Yeah. Streaming on YouTube was kind of disorganized, so we all tried telling him to stream on Twitch. I don't know why he never listened to us, but he never did."

There was pride in his voice. Dream decided he would be proud, too.

"Well, look at him now," Dream said.

"Yeah." He rested his head on Dream's shoulder. "Look at him now."

They watched the stream in silence, George's head buried into the crook of Dream's neck.

“Dreamwastaken?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“Because... Dream was taken.”

George blinked as Dream chuckled to himself. “I’m not sure what I expected, to be honest.”

“I don’t know what you expected either.”

The Twitch channel was made at the asscrack of dawn. It had taken him a couple minutes to adjust all the settings to suit his channel and another hour to track down and follow everyone he followed on his personal account, but it was finally done. All he needed to do now was hit a button to stream.

All he needed to do...

Fuck. He had made it this far with relative ease. Why was it so hard now?

“You gonna stream tonight?” George asked, his sentence cutting itself off with a yawn.

Dream glanced down at his hand. “Well, that’s the plan.”

And somehow, George hummed in acknowledgement of the feelings Dream didn’t know he was expressing and nodded. “It doesn’t need to be a long one. It doesn’t need to be perfect either.”

“Yeah, but—”

“Dream, you’re literally such a perfectionist you get in your own way. Push yourself aside and do it.”

Dream stopped.

He said that so matter-of-factly, blankly, without any particular attachment in his voice. If Dream didn’t know better, he would think George didn’t care.

But of course he cared. It was just truly that simple. It had always boiled down to that, whether Dream was aware of it or not.

“I...” Dream swallowed, the knot in his stomach untangling just the slightest bit. “Yeah. Just have to turn my brain off, I guess.”

“I don’t know. I’d say your brain does you a lot of good sometimes. You’re just being stupid.”

Dream laughed and hit record. If the laugh was captured in the beginning microseconds of the vod, he wasn’t aware of it.

When George put a hand on his shoulder and wrapped a wing around him, all the tension in Dream’s body faded.

Speedrunning that night had come easily after a couple of runs. And that got Dream thinking, as he oft to do.

“Listen to me,” Dream said, “Minecraft manhunt. A speedrunner tries to beat the game while a hunter tries to kill the speedrunner. If the speedrunner kills the ender dragon first, the speedrunner wins. If the hunter kills the speedrunner once, the hunter wins.”

There was a groan on the other end of the call. “This sounds cool and all, but did you have to call me at eight in the morning? Shouldn’t you be asleep?”

“Time waits for no one, Sapnap.”

“Maybe, but you’re gonna wait for me to put some damn pants on before we talk about this.”

George laughed at that. “Why’d you take another eight AM class? Didn’t you spend all of last year bitching about it?”

“I actually learn nothing from my lessons ever. We both know this.”

As George snickered and poked more fun at him, Dream stopped to think some more.

His audience had been receptive to speedrunning streams. All of Dream’s videos with a coded plug-in had contained at least one aspect of speedrunning, and all of them had been doing well if his increasing sub and view counts were to count for anything. Every bone in his body (and cell in his brain, for that matter) told him that a speedrunner versus hunter was projected to do well.

The only problem was who would be hunting him down. Dream was friendly with George’s old friend group, but not quite comfortable enough to justify hanging out one-on-one in a call with them for hours. The only person willing (and able) to show themselves in the public sphere with him was Sapnap, but of course he chose this year to be a good student and actually attend class. Fucking nerd.

And that was how Dream justified calling Sapnap right before his eight AM class: to test how receptive Sapnap would be to the idea of pushing school aside for a couple hours to record a video. But in hindsight, maybe that hadn’t been quite the right approach to this.

“Okay, whatever,” Sapnap sighed. “Why can’t you get George to record with you? You could probably buy another computer.”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows and pursed his lips. “Sapnap.”

“... Oh, right. Sorry, it’s early. You sure you really want me to record with you?”

“Yes.”

Sapnap paused to think, and there was a rustling of paper in the background. “Okay, I guess it can’t be helped then. How about tomorrow night? I have a class that morning, but that’s it.”

Dream typed that into his notes. “Tomorrow night at seven my time then?”

“Uh... yeah, that should work for me. Can I go to class now?”

“What a loser, having to go to class,” George laughed. “Imagine still being in school.”

“Nerd!” Dream jeered right as Sapnap laughed and rushed out a goodbye before hanging up.

He turned to George, his heart racing from elation.

George offered him a grin. “Well, you’re being assassinated in Minecraft in, like, twelve hours. How’re you feeling?”

Dream shrugged. “Pretty confident. I’ve been thinking of a few strategies before this, but, um...”

He frowned.

He wished he could play Minecraft manhunt with George. Sapnap was his best friend and he loved him, yes, but something about the fact fate had specifically raised its middle finger to him only made that desire stronger.

“You alright?” George asked.

Focusing on what could have been was pointless. He should appreciate what he had now. Not everyone had a good friend willing to drop school to play Minecraft with him.

Dream smiled. “Yeah. Just thinking.”

Dream disconnected from the TeamSpeak channel, his heart pumping and mind racing.

The manhunt had ended at a standoff between him and Sapnap, him having pillared up and Sapnap remaining on the ground. Sapnap had landed an ender pearl on just the right block and knocked Dream off the pillar. The following foot chase had ended quickly; Sapnap was already a competent fighter even when he didn’t have half a health bar on Dream.

But holy hell, if that wasn’t some of the most fun he had had in his life. He hadn’t felt this much emotion from a video game in a while. In fact, when was the last time he had played a video game that wasn’t Minecraft?

“You okay?”

Dream took his headset off and whirled around to meet George’s curious gaze, smiling upon seeing him approach with a cup of water. He took the cup with a grateful nod and tried not to think about how happy their fingers brushing against each other made him. “Thanks. Yeah, I just finished recording.”

“Did you kick Sapnap’s ass?”

“No, he kicked mine.”

“Wow. You’re trash.”

Dream kicked at George’s ankle, rolling his eyes when George only laughed in response. “Oh, come on. It’s not like you would’ve done any better.”

George snickered. “I would’ve beaten the game in the first minute. I thought you were the speedrunner here.”

“I hate you.”

“You stand by that?”

“Yup.” Dream exited out of OBS after saving the video to his computer. He’d have to edit that tomorrow while it was still fresh in his head. “That was really fun, though. I think I’m gonna try this again.”

George’s smile softened at that. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Dream repeated gently.

Contemplative silence fell over them. Clips from the recording played through Dream’s mind. He couldn’t imagine what George was thinking.

“Dream,” George called.

“Yeah?”

“Your channel’s doing pretty well, isn’t it?”

That was a weird question, but Dream remembered Sapnap mentioning his current sub count sometime during the video. “Yeah. I think I’m about to hit a hundred thousand subs soon. Why do you say that?”

George hummed and turned away. “No reason.”

Dream had a feeling his smile was gone.

Thinking was something Dream felt he did too often nowadays. Thankfully, his brain shut down automatically by itself near four in the morning. It seemed George’s brain worked the same way.

“I thought you didn’t need sleep,” Dream mused upon seeing George yawn and rub his eyes.

“Well, I’m in this flesh prison right now, and it needs rest,” George said. “I know I’ve taken this form on a lot more recently, but I don’t think I could ever get used to it again. It just takes so much work.”

“... Were you one of those gamer men who never showered?”

George shoved him as Dream laughed, fighting back his own giggling. “No! I had a healthy sense of hygiene like everyone else. I’m just saying I’m not used to it anymore.”

Dream saved his work on Eclipse before shutting his computer down. “Yeah. I guess that’s true.”

And it was. Dream had consistently been in this body for twenty-one years now, and he still found it tough to remember to take care of himself sometimes. Taking care of a physical body after years of not having one must’ve been difficult.

Dream stood up from his seat and made an incomprehensible sound as he stretched his limbs. “I’m headed to sleep now. You gonna join me?”

George yawned again as he moved to stand up, an unspoken answer to his question. His feet planted themselves firmly on the ground and his body tipped forward, but his feet didn't move with —

Dream caught George right before he could fall past the point of no return and steadied him upright.

What the hell? Was this a thing that had just happened? Was this actually something that happened right before his eyes?

Dream was the first to start laughing, George muttering something out before bursting out laughing himself.

"I can't believe—" Dream cut himself off. Newfound energy surged through his body, and he could feel an insuppressible grin rising to his lips. He did it. Holy shit, he did it! "George! I saved you!"

"You saved me!" George cheered through his laughter.

"I saved you! I'm your guardian angel!"

"You're my guardian angel!"

Dream collapsed onto his bed, pain searing through his abdomen with each laugh he wheezed out. His laughter only grew when George collapsed beside him.

They spent the rest of the night giggling at each other while kicking each other under the sheets. And as childish as it was, Dream couldn't have been happier.

"We should quit pretending everything's okay."

Dream's blood ran cold.

George was turned away from him, staring out at the stormy clouds hanging above the city with horribly dull eyes.

It was barely eight in the evening. The two had been sitting in a comfortable silence (or at least, what Dream had thought was a comfortable silence) in the living room, Dream with his legs up on the couch and George sitting on the windowsill. The dishes from today's lunch and dinner still hadn't been washed yet. A warm love song from Dream's Spotify library played distantly, and Dream couldn't help but think the irony was perfect.

"What?" Dream croaked.

George furrowed his eyebrows at Dream's response before his eyebrows shot up. "Oh, wait, shit, not like that. Not like that. I just mean..." He frowned and moved his gaze down to study his fingernails. "Remember when I told you that all guardian angels must fulfill two things?"

Dream wracked his memory. "Uh, the regrets and dying protectively thing?"

"Yeah. We already established I died protectively... I guess. But here's the thing." He paused, and

his voice cracked in a way Dream would mock if his heart wasn't about to beat out of his chest. "God, I don't wanna say it."

"George," Dream called as softly as he could. There was still a tremor in his voice. "Just say it."

George hesitated but said, "I have no regrets tying me to Earth now."

Dream took in a sharp breath.

That was true. And that was all he needed to say.

George was amazing. He was smart, he was kind, he was everything Dream had ever wanted in a friend and a lover. But despite it all, nobody could hide from reality. Not for long before reality started knocking on doors demanding answers.

These past few weeks had been a blissful snapshot into what their lives together could've looked like, but reality would always loom over them no matter how much they tried to pretend it didn't exist, how much they deluded themselves into believing they were normal. Nothing had been normal from the moment George had come crashing into his life.

"I can rest now," George said, and Dream noted the bags under his eyes and the slump in his back. "I have no obligations from my past life I need to fulfill. You're well on your way to having a successful life. After being a guardian angel, all that's left for me is... peace."

"Peace," Dream repeated.

George nodded. "I'm not sure what exactly is left for me after fulfilling everything I need to do, but..." He bit his lip. "I wasn't entirely truthful about what I did before I met you."

Dream's skin prickled. He listened as best as he could with his mind jumping to any conclusion it could get its hands on. But it turned out all of the conclusions were false anyway.

"What happened was they gave me an option to either be assigned as a guardian angel for someone or roam the planet by myself. They were both presented to me as ways to come to peace with my death."

"And you chose the former?"

"Oh, hell no. I was an idiot. I saw..." He screwed his eyes shut. "I saw so many things during that. I saw how my family reacted at the news, my friends going to my funeral, everyone hating themselves for something that wasn't their fault. And I couldn't do anything about it. I was begging to become a guardian angel by the time they asked me again. Those three years wore me out mentally and physically."

"Physically?"

George chuckled at that and opened his eyes. "As physically as a guardian angel can get anyway. You were actually my first assignment."

"... Me?" Dream breathed.

"Yeah. We both got lucky, didn't we?" George said with a wry smile. The smile faded. "But the point is I've been wanting to rest for a while. I don't regret anything, I don't have any loose ends I need to tie up, I don't have anything official keeping me down here. I don't really have confirmation on this, but what's stopping everyone above me from just taking me back up at any

second?”

Dream’s heart dropped at that. His head felt fuzzy at the thought of waking up and suddenly finding an empty apartment. He couldn’t imagine it; there was a blank screen when he tried to picture it.

“Yeah. I’d at least like to leave on my own terms.” George took in a deep breath and looked at him so earnestly Dream felt his throat tighten. “Dream, you’ve helped me so much through everything. Can you help me with one more thing?”

“What is it?” came tumbling out of Dream’s mouth before he could think.

“Visit my grave with me.”

His grave.

George was dead. There was no bringing him back. He had reminded himself of it time and time again, but it only now sunk in.

“Your grave?” Dream said.

“Yeah. It’s the last step I need to take, but I don’t think I can do it alone. I’m honestly not quite sure where it is, so you might have to dig around for that. I understand if you don’t want to—”

“No, no, George,” Dream said. Despite the warmth building behind his eyes, despite the heaviness of his heart, despite everything, he smiled. George deserved at least that much. “You’ve helped *me* so much with everything. Literally everything. Do you know how fucking—” He sniffed, and he could feel a tear dribbling down his cheek and his heart crying out for something he wasn’t sure about yet. “—how fucking empty my life felt before you? I didn’t know I could love life so much. I didn’t know I could genuinely look forward to another day. I didn’t realize it at the time, but it’s so true. I see it now. I see it every day I live with you.”

George’s lips tightened as if he was close to crying. “Dream—”

“You’ve given me a life, George. And you did it out of love, didn’t you? You loved this stranger so much you fell down from heaven to make sure he didn’t die before his time was up. You stuck with him even after he made that shitty—” Dream laughed as more tears welled up in his eyes. His vision was blurry now, but he could hear George gasp for air. Were they both crying now? “He made that shitty joke about angels falling from heaven, and you still stuck by him every day. You could’ve left him at any time, but you didn’t because you loved him. And you know what? It took him fucking forever to realize it, but he loves you, too. *I* love you, too. You’ve given me a life. I’ll give you yours, too.”

“Dream,” George sobbed. “You don’t—You don’t owe me anything.”

“I know I don’t. I just...” Dream sniffed and rubbed the tears away from his eyes. “I love you so much. I love you more than I knew I could love someone.”

And he meant that. He felt it with every atom of his being every time he looked at George, every time he thought about George. Love was a stronger force than anything else in the world.

“I... Dream.”

When George stood up from his place on the windowsill and surged forward to wrap him into a hug, Dream knew George felt it, too. Dream felt everything George couldn’t say, everything he

wanted to say, everything wrapped up too deeply for George to navigate well enough to put into comprehensible words.

But love didn't know language. Love knew no barrier. They both knew that from personal experience.

Dream sobbed into George's shoulder, his wings only a reminder of what they couldn't have. And likewise, George hid from the world behind Dream's shoulder. It was all they could do now.

Then George chuckled. He sniffed before speaking. "You—You know what I just realized?"

Dream held on tighter, not trusting himself to speak.

"My death anniversary is coming up soon. Isn't that a bitch?"

Well.

What else could Dream do but laugh at that?

See You Later

Chapter Notes

thank you for all the support. seriously. ily

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There was no easy way to ask a question like this, but Dream supposed he would at least start honestly. That was the best he could offer in a situation like this.

Dream [06:22] hey since youre in the UK

Dream [06:22] do you know the address of george's grave?

Dream [06:22] i mean if he even has one

Dream [06:23] sorry for the early message

And luckily, he didn't need to wait longer than a few minutes to get a message back.

Ponk [06:26] isnt it super late over there??

Well, that depended on who he asked. But this was later than Dream's usual hours, yes.

Dream [06:27] couldnt sleep

Ponk [06:27] ah yeah, i get that

Ponk [06:27] you down to call rn?

Ponk [06:27] feel like thatll be good for both of us

Huh. George was asleep in his bedroom, and even Patches had curled up on the chair in the living room, purring in her sleep softly. Dream still had some energy left for a phone call.

Dream [06:28] yeah sure

A moment later, Dream accepted the call as quickly as it came. They exchanged greetings before Ponk segued into the main topic.

"So," Ponk started, "I'm guessing the news is still a bit, uh... rawer for you than it is for us, right?"

Dream blinked, then understood. "Oh, yeah."

And it was. George would be gone forever this time, just like he had been for years to his friends.

God, the thought of it made him feel dizzy. He took a seat on the couch as Ponk continued speaking.

"The anniversary is coming up soon." He didn't need to specify the anniversary of what, and it seemed he understood that, too. "Usually what we do is travel to Bad's house in the States, but that's really only because he's, like, at the center of us geographically. This year, I wanted to do something different."

"Something different?"

“Yeah. Everyone’s finally in a place where they can get some time off on the week of the anniversary, so, um...” There was a smile in his voice, but his voice still wobbled the slightest bit, as if he were nervous for Dream’s response. Dream didn’t understand that. “I wanted to ask all of you if you’d be willing to give the UK a visit on the anniversary week.”

Oh.

“Like, we’d get to meet you, pay our respects to his grave together—”

“I’m in.” The words tumbled out of Dream’s mouth before he could think too much about it. Honestly, that was for the best. He needed to stop thinking so much.

Ponk paused. “Oh, that quickly? Are you sure?”

Dream let out a short laugh at that. “Yeah, that quickly. It’s a good idea. Like...” His mind scrambled to find the correct string of words to use. Thankfully, his mind supplied them and his voice didn’t fail him, even if it felt a bit shaky as if it were his first time using it. “I really wanna meet you guys, see who George was friends with before me. Knowing that there’s people going through the same thing as me—that helps a lot more than you’d think.”

“No,” Ponk said with a soft laugh of his own. “I know. Trust me.”

That was true. He did know. He knew far more than Dream could hope to understand.

“I’ll send you the address to the cemetery,” Ponk said after a moment of silence. “Just in case the plan falls apart.”

“Yeah. Thank you.”

Dream had never been the best at expressing how he felt verbally. He hoped with every bit of his being that Ponk understood the meaning, caught the genuineness behind his words.

Judging by the small chuckle on the other end of the line, Ponk did. “Alright, that’s settled then. Talk to you later, man.”

“See you.”

The two hung up, and Dream wondered if he had made the right choice.

Dream trusted himself more than a reasonable person should, but his studies and creativity had never let him down. His YouTube career was no exception.

Minecraft Manhunt had blown up almost overnight like he had predicted. Yet even as celebration messages rolled in and the view count increased with every page refresh, he couldn’t bring himself to so much as smile.

Sapnap slammed his hands against his desk and took a deep breath before shouting, “100k, let’s gooo!”

Dream winced at the volume but allowed himself to chuckle.

It didn't come out quite right, like the laugh was a fish struggling against the sharp thread of a net. And he had no excuse for it either; it was eleven in the evening, far before he usually went to sleep. He and Sapnap had practically grown up together. He should've expected Sapnap to notice sooner or later.

"Dude," Sapnap called.

Dream sighed and redirected his gaze down to his desk, knowing what was about to come.

"You haven't really been yourself lately. What's up?"

George, who had been sitting next to him, gently nudged him with a foot underneath the desk. Dream didn't have to look up to picture George's concerned gaze.

He pursed his lips as something stabbed his heart.

Oh, damn it. He wasn't strong enough for this.

"Dream?" Sapnap said, worry lacing his voice. He was such a carefree person; worry didn't belong in his voice.

Dream muted his mic but didn't quite trust himself to turn towards George. Seeing what he would be losing was too painful. "I'm telling Sapnap. Can I tell Sapnap?"

There was a moment of silence before George shrugged and said, "Go ahead."

So Dream took a deep breath before pushing his feelings down and unmuting his mic. His voice came out more level than he had expected, and he was thankful for that. "Sapnap. You're not gonna like what I'm about to tell you."

"Wow, how dramatic," George mused quietly, to which Dream allowed himself to chuckle more genuinely. At least one of them was taking this situation in stride.

"Okay, so this can't be anything good," Sapnap said. His words were slow as though he were weighing each closely before releasing them into the wild to be judged. "Just hit me with it. I'm a big boy, I can take—"

"George is dying."

Silence.

"Well, not really *dying*, that was a bit much. But—"

"No, no, I got that part. Seems kind of hard to die again after dying the first time." Sapnap barked out a short laugh, the kind of laugh Dream noticed he only made when he didn't know how else to react. "Man... what? Why is this—why is this happening? Is he still there with you?"

"Yeah, he is."

"Can I talk to him?"

Dream took his headphones off and turned towards George. "Sapnap wants to talk to you."

George took the set of headphones before Dream exited the room. They deserved the privacy.

Dream sat down on the couch in the living room. The world around him was fuzzy, as if he were

peering through a screen of TV static. Everything around him was a glitchy mess. The sight of it all made him want to throw up.

Something warm butted into his side.

Dream looked down, only to see Patches curling up next to him, purring and gazing up at him with all the love a cat could have for its owner in the world. And people said cats were cold.

Or maybe he was just projecting. Either way, his heart lightened just a bit when Patches playfully swatted at his hand.

He smiled as he turned on a YouTube video in the background and turned his full attention to Patches.

Yeah. Maybe he could do this after all.

A couple hours passed before George emerged from his bedroom with tear-streaked cheeks and a grin brighter than the stars fixed on his face. By this time at night, most of the lights inside the buildings around Dream's apartment complex had been flickered off, leaving only a few other night owls up in solidarity with him. The streetlamps did almost nothing to brighten up the darkness in the city, though they certainly did try their best.

Dream turned his attention back to Patches, who had dozed off long ago. Staring after what had probably been an emotional conversation was probably rude. "How'd it go?"

"I think..." George offered him a gentle smile. "I think it went well. We talked about a lot of things. More philosophy than I would've expected from someone as stupid as him."

"Did he say anything about... you know?"

"Yeah, we talked about that a lot. I think..." George chuckled as he reached out to tousle Dream's hair. "I think we'll be okay. I think we'll all be okay."

Dream leaned into his touch, a smile growing on his face.

He was content with that answer.

Sapnap [18:46] so i cant really come over for a full week like i did

Sapnap [18:46] really only for one day if i skip my algorithms class

Sapnap [18:46] so basically

Sapnap [18:46] im coming over rn :)

What the fuck.

"Sapnap," Dream said as soon as Sapnap picked up the phone after the third attempt. "Are you

coming over, like, now?”

Sapnap cackled, and there was the distinct sound of wind rushing past a car in the background. “Hell yeah, dude! YOLO, right?”

“God, I’m dead and that hurt *my* soul,” George muttered from his spot across from him at the kitchen table. He stuffed a forkful of spinach into his mouth. “How bleak.”

Dream snorted at that, letting out a chuckle at Sapnap’s disappointed groan. “Yeah, that was pretty bad. But what the fuck? You’re just coming over?”

Sapnap paused, and a turn signal clicked over the phone. “Yeah. I’m taking a plane this time, though. I won’t be staying over for a night or anything if you don’t have space. It’s only for a day, and then I’m gone on the next flight. Poof. Hasta la vista, fucker.”

“If you die this time, I’m not saving you,” George said.

“What? Damn. I see how it—Okay, fuck you, guy. Are you kidding me? What kind stupid bumper stickered, no turn signal looking—”

“Wow, I can’t believe Sapnap’s dead.”

Sapnap took a deep breath. “Okay, sorry, some idiot cut me off at the airport. Anyway, I’m coming over, and we’re gonna have a blast. We’re gonna, like, explode some shit, okay? Maybe not *exploding* exploding, but we’re young, dude. We’re all young. We’re young and dumb and we’re gonna do some stupid shit. That good?”

He was breathless by the end of the speech, and Dream found himself gasping for air even if he hadn’t been the one speaking. Sapnap’s words were frantic, rushed, as if he were trying to convince himself. If Dream hadn’t known him for all his life, he would’ve missed the strain in his voice.

Dream’s heart panged.

Sapnap didn’t need to keep a strong front for him. They were brothers, not just friends.

Dream opened his mouth to say as such, but Sapnap spoke again.

“Well, I don’t care what you say because I’m coming over no matter what. Bye, Dreamy! Bye, Georgie! Muah!” Sapnap burst into a round of laughter after that as Dream hurried to end the call, grinning as he listened to George laugh.

“What an idiot,” George laughed.

Dream smiled but couldn’t quite bring himself to so much as chuckle.

Sapnap would be here soon. Sapnap would be here, and the pain would be just a little easier to bear.

Maybe.

He hoped so.

“Yeah, we’re just young, dumb, and broke, but we still got love to gi—”

“Get in before my neighbors file another complaint,” Dream sighed before stepping forward and throwing his arms around Sapnap.

Sapnap leaned in and hugged back with such force Dream had to laugh and wince at the crushing pressure. A moment passed before he raised his head and said, “George, you idiot, why do you never wanna be in group hugs? Get in here.”

There was a pause before another set of arms wrapped around them.

Dream melted into the contact.

His family was here. His family was right beside him, and he felt he could sob from how perfect it all was. Of course something this perfect would never last forever.

But for a moment, the world felt okay again. And he’d be damned if he would let that moment pass unappreciated.

Dream shut his eyes and let himself forget about the future storm incoming.

“Okay, we have to have a conversation,” Dream sighed, to which Sapnap let out an indignant huff and George smiled.

It was twenty minutes into a Monopoly game, and Dream would be the first to admit maybe playing Monopoly with two competitive people and one carefree yet competent person was a mistake. George had dominated most of the map, having placed down hotels and houses wherever he could. Dream had gone bankrupt early in the game, but Sapnap was still determined to win, occasionally yelling about taking down “King George’s regime.”

Whatever that meant. Dream wasn’t certain Sapnap knew what the word “regime” meant. But either way, Dream felt he needed to intervene before the two could fist-fight in his apartment.

“Why?” Sapnap said.

“George is very important.”

George grinned at that, and Dream couldn’t help but smile, too.

Sapnap rolled his eyes. “No, he’s not.”

“He’s crucial to the team.”

“He’s not.”

“He’s very kind and sweet—”

“I’m better than him.”

Dream sighed. This wasn't going anywhere. Maybe a little concession would help. "I know, you can be better than him. That's fine. Listen. George is beautiful."

George burst out laughing as Sapnap said, "No, he's not."

"And he's handsome—"

"He's not."

"And he's smart—"

"He's not."

"And he's kind—"

"He is *not* kind."

"And he is wonderful. He's a wonderful—" Holy fuck, Dream never told Sapnap about his... relationship? Whatever-ship. "Friend."

What a cop-out way to end a sentence. George turned to him with a raised eyebrow at that, and Dream could only offer him a shrug. It wasn't like they had ever talked about what they were.

Sapnap rambled on about George forcing him to pay for a night's stay at some hotel on a red property while George and Dream locked eyes.

They needed to talk about that sometime, huh?

Dream didn't have much time to linger on that thought before Sapnap's voice cut through.

"Wait, fuck," Sapnap said, "you guys are totally dating, aren't you?"

Dream burst out laughing, the questions in his head fading as George giggled along.

"What the hell?" Sapnap's hands flew to his head. "Why does nobody ever tell me these things? You can tell me about the time you pissed the bed but you can't tell me you have a boyfriend? Dream!"

"You *what*?" came George's incredulous voice.

"Holy shit. He never told you?" The shine in Sapnap's eyes was much too mischievous for Dream's liking, and his smirk only solidified the bad feeling in Dream's gut. "Okay, so—"

"Sapnap!" Dream called, but the laughter that followed ended any hopes of him coming across as intimidating. Not like it would've worked anyway. Sapnap had the self-preservation of a shitty coat hanger.

Sapnap told the story over fits of laughter, and Dream sat cross-armed as George listened to every word.

Bastards, the lot of them. Even if he loved them to hell and back.

The rest of the day was just as eventful as their Monopoly session, but that was to be expected with a family like theirs. Sapnap dragged the two out to the same arcade, convention hall, shitty yet unique restaurants they had visited the last time he had been in town. Dream had accused him of only taking them to those places because those were the only places he knew, to which Sapnap stuck his tongue out at him like a child.

But of course, the world waited for no one. It had been easy to ignore reality, but there was only so long he could do so.

“You guys think I can make it to the airport before my flight?” Sapnap asked. “Or do you think I’ll have to play bus parkour?”

“You’re gonna have to play bus parkour either way,” Dream said. And that was true. One massive oversight of this town had to be how difficult it was to navigate to other places through just one bus.

George hummed as he glanced at the clock on the wall. “You probably have enough time if you head out now.”

Sapnap snorted at that. “Wow, did you hear that, Dream? George wants me gone.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“You’re such a baby, Sapnap,” Dream said, rolling his eyes. He smiled when Sapnap sputtered and whined about the two ganging up on him. He held his arms out. “Come here, you loser.”

Sapnap fell into the hug, chuckling when Dream stumbled back from the force. And after they separated, Sapnap turned and held his arms open for George with a pout.

George leveled a jokingly hesitant glance at him.

“Please, Gogy?” Sapnap whined. “Pleeeaaase?”

George rolled his eyes but hugged him with a smile. “You’re so annoying, you know that?”

“No, you’re more annoying,” Sapnap said, his voice muffled by George’s shoulder.

“You’re the most annoying.”

“You’re more annoying than that.”

“Well, you’re more annoying than *that*.”

“You’re both idiots,” Dream laughed.

When they separated, Sapnap took his phone out of his pocket and scrolled through what was presumably a bus map. “I should get going now if I wanna make it back tomorrow.” Then he offered them a warm, dopey grin that made Dream feel everything would be okay and said, “Thanks for hanging out with me today. I’ll see you guys later, okay?”

Dream froze.

That wasn’t true. It couldn’t be true; George would be leaving so soon. Dream didn’t know exactly when, but he knew he didn’t have a lot of time left with him.

But Sapnap had said that to both him and George, and when Sapnap said something, he felt it so

strongly he would shout it from the rooftops if prompted to. Then again, he knew George had limited time on the planet. He wouldn't be so tactless as to ignore reality either, so why was he—

Oh. Huh.

Dream crossed his arms, but it did nothing to take away from the warmth budding in his chest.

He and Sapnap would physically see each other again; that was a fact of life. The chances of either of them dying or being otherwise incapacitated were low, given they were two young, generally healthy people.

But George?

Some sort of higher force—whether it be fate, luck, destiny, whatever it liked to go by—had already bound George to both of them. Hell, George's continued existence itself was evidence that that higher force existed in the first place. Even if they never saw each other physically on Earth ever again, even if George disappeared off the face of the planet right now, they'd all still see each other again. Maybe it was supernatural bullshit, but Dream had named himself after the one thing that threw all logic to the wind.

They would see each other again. In the afterlife or another life or somewhere he hadn't considered, Dream wasn't certain, but he had believed in himself and in George for this long and this strongly. He could place his faith in them again countless times over.

And looking back, maybe that was what Sapnap and George had spoken about so candidly to each other, why they didn't hesitate to say a goodbye.

So Dream waved, blinking back a wet warmth building behind his eyes. "See you later, Sapnap. Love you."

"Take care of yourself," George added softly.

If Dream looked carefully, he could see Sapnap's eyes glisten just the slightest bit. Sapnap turned his face away before Dream could arrive at a conclusion.

"I love you guys, alright?" Sapnap said with a chuckle punctuating his sentence. "Have a good one."

And with that, Sapnap stepped out of the apartment and shut the door behind him. Still, his presence lingered amongst the silence.

(Well, save for Patches's footsteps in the background. But an apartment could never truly be silent with a pet.)

"I'm totally paying for that plane ticket," Dream said.

"Yeah, didn't expect any different from you." George grabbed Dream's phone off the counter and handed it to him. "I still don't know how Sapnap got a flight that quickly."

Dream hummed as he scrolled through flight listings online and smiled when a wing wrapped around his back. "You got real tired of being human, huh?"

As George began rambling about how difficult maintaining a mortal body was, a text popped up in Dream's notifications.

Ponk [21:32] finalized the plan im gonna share with everyone. You wanna hear it first?

Dream typed back a “yes” with no hesitation.

He had made the correct choice. He had to believe in that.

Chapter End Notes

finishing this story by the end of the month. just a couple more chapters left to go

Funeral March

“Hey, what do you think of this?”

Dream took one glance at the screen before snorting and rolling his eyes. He recognized that scene in the video; he was the one who had spent too many nights editing it. “George, that’s my video.”

“Isn’t it so good?” George giggled. “It’s obvious there was a lot of effort put into it. That outplay right there was pretty clean, too. Whoever’s recording must be a god at Minecraft.”

Dream grinned despite himself. This was the person he had fallen in love with, huh? And he couldn’t be happier about it. “You’re such an idiot.”

“Just so smart.”

“I hate you.”

“Has a nice voice.”

“You’re so stupid.”

“Well, this person clearly is not.”

“You’re so annoying, you know that? You’re such a—” Dream cut himself off to laugh, diverting his gaze back towards a new notification on his phone.

Alyssa [12:11] did ponk tell you about the anniversary?

Dream texted back a quick answer before focusing his entire attention on George commentating over the video as if he hadn’t watched Dream edit it for hours on end. Even if talking to George’s friends was more important now than it ever had been before, Dream wouldn’t be able to forgive himself if he had wasted even a second of his time left with George.

He wondered if George knew that, if he felt the same way, too.

“Look at those MLG plays!” George shouted. He raised a palm to the side of his head for dramatic effect and gasped.

Dream rolled his eyes but couldn’t keep the grin off his face.

This was the person he had fallen so hard for. Despite everything, Dream had no regrets.

The next text came later that afternoon right after Dream had finished watching a movie with George.

Alyssa [16:43] are you going?

Dream took a moment to evaluate the viability of this discussion.

The end credits rolled by across the television screen in front of him, soft orchestral music accompanying the text onscreen. Patches was sprawled on the carpet and hadn't moved for the past hour or so. But most importantly, George had dozed off somewhere at the halfway point of the movie after a straight hour of interrupting important moments with questions (There was no way it wasn't intentional, no way). His head rested right in the crook of Dream's neck, and his side pressed up against Dream's. Honestly, Dream felt a bit sleepy.

But this was probably important. Dream shouldn't delay a conversation he knew would happen at some point.

Dream [16:44] yeah. Are you?

Alyssa [16:44] of course!

Alyssa [16:44] i just needed to ask um

Alyssa [16:45] so i was thinking about the meetup

Alyssa [16:45] and i got this idea

Alyssa [16:45] what if we all bring something that was precious to us and george?

So, so many things came to mind. And maybe he was selfish or had hoarding tendencies that never made themselves known until now, but the thought of parting with those items made his stomach churn. Even if it was part of the mourning process, he didn't think he would be ready for that for a while.

Dream [16:46] it sounds cool but just one question

Dream [16:46] are we like

Dream [16:46] leaving them at the cemetery or something?

The response came quickly, almost frantically.

Alyssa [16:46] oh no!!! I wouldnt ask people to do something like that

Alyssa [16:46] though i do think itd be fun to leave little gifts for him at the cemetery

Alyssa [16:47] oh god that didn't come off how i wanted it to

Alyssa [16:47] i meant i think he'd appreciate it

Alyssa [16:47] and itd bring all of us closer together

Alyssa [16:47] uh

Alyssa [16:47] :)

Dream [16:48] LOL yeah i get what you mean

Dream [16:48] i think its a good idea

Dream [16:48] be sure to tell the others

Alyssa [16:48] ok ok

Alyssa [16:48] and now we never speak of this

Dream laughed softly at that, careful not to disturb the head resting on his shoulder. Yet despite his best efforts, George stirred and stretched his arms with a yawn.

"Oh, the movie's over?" George asked, blinking blearily.

Dream looked back up, only to see a black screen. He must've missed the rest of the credits and outro. "It's been over for a while. You missed, like, the entire second half."

George scoffed and leaned closer into Dream. "Not like it was a particularly riveting story anyway.

What're you doing now?"

"Texting Alyssa."

"Alyssa? How's she doing?"

"She just asked me about, like... you know. Our trip to the UK soon."

"Oh, you told our friends?"

Dream raised an eyebrow at that. Nothing in George's voice indicated he cared whatsoever about him communicating with his old friends, but...

"Our friends?" Dream asked.

George hummed. "Yes, our friends. They're just as much your friends as they are mine."

Huh. Dream had never thought about it that way, but they had, hadn't they? He had been on phone calls with Ponk, played a couple rounds of CSGO with Punz, sent memes back and forth with Callahan, offered advice to Alyssa on a couple occasions. In return, Ponk invited him to playing games on Munchy, Punz asked to accompany him in Hypixel parkour houses, Callahan threw programming resources his way once in a while, and Alyssa spammed him with cat pictures at random times. While he wouldn't say he was part of the cohesive unit that was their friend group, getting along with them on an individual level had been easier than he had expected.

They were good people. They were all good people, and he couldn't wait to meet them, even if it was under such awful circumstances.

Should he feel that way?

"I hope you get a chance to meet them one day," George said.

How... How the fuck did he guess that? Were they really that connected as guardian angel and human or did George just get a lucky guess?

Before Dream could get too far into his thoughts, George offered Dream a smile. "And I hope they get to meet you, too. You're all... very important people to me."

He trailed off at that, and the smile slipped off his face. That look didn't suit George.

Dream fixed as smug of a grin as he could conjure on his face and elbowed him. "But I'm your favorite, right?"

George scoffed, but the smile on his face was back.

"I'm just the favorite of all your favorites, right?"

"In your dreams, Dream."

Dream wrapped an arm around George's shoulders and sang, "I'm just your faaaavowite!"

George burst out laughing at that. "Ew, why are you talking like that?"

"Aren't I your very favowrite in the whole world, Georgie?"

"I hate you," George laughed as he jokingly pushed Dream away. He clapped and held his arms out

towards Patches, who had stirred awake from the commotion. “Patches is my favorite, actually. Patches! Come here!”

And like a traitor, Patches walked towards them, leapt on top of the couch cushions, and curled up next to George. Unbelievable.

Dream rolled his eyes, smiling as he watched George raise a hand to pat Patches on the head.

Even if George claimed Patches was his favorite, Dream was content with second place.

These strings of code weren’t here before.

Dream rubbed his eyes, leaning into his computer screen to read the unfamiliar lines coded into Eclipse. It was too early in the morning for this; he hadn’t even put in his contacts yet.

His phone buzzed next to him with another notification anyway. Bastard machine.

Dream saved the lines of code and exited out of the program before picking up his phone.

Callahan [10:22] hey can u look at my code? It keeps breaking and im not sure where the error is

Was he ready for this? He had just woken up not even five minutes ago, yet everything was happening so quickly.

Whatever. It was for a friend.

Friend. That word still made Dream smile.

Dream [10:22] yeah sure

Callahan sent an attachment

It was a picture of Callahan’s Minecraft skin zoomed in on his face.

Of course. Callahan was Callahan, after all.

Dream chuckled to himself, typing out a reply.

Dream [10:23] youre an idiot

Callahan [10:23] ur the idiot for thinking i would bother u with all that code

Callahan [10:23] anyway

Callahan [10:23] ponk told us we could stay at his house when we go over

Callahan [10:23] either that or you can stay at a hotel

Callahan [10:23] so just let him know

Oh, right. He had been informed this would be a week-long excursion, after all. He probably should’ve thought of living accommodations before getting this far. But what was the best move here for people he technically didn’t know?

“You look troubled.”

Dream turned his head to face George, who had somehow materialized in the seat next to him. He raised an eyebrow. "How long have you been here?"

"You were taking too long to come out for breakfast, so I decided to see what was going on," George said. His gaze drifted towards the computer. "Oh, you saved my work on Eclipse, right?"

"Yeah, don't worry about that. What're you coding anyway?"

"Don't worry about that."

Dream chuckled at that. "Touche."

But how was he supposed to explain this situation? George hadn't so much as blinked when Dream had mentioned Alyssa back a few days ago, compared to when Dream had first brought them up. Thinking back on it now, George had grown so much and Dream had missed all signs of it until now.

So truth. Truth was the best way to confront this.

"Well, you know how we're going to the UK for your... you know?" Dream said. He continued when George nodded. "Your friends wanted to visit, too. As in, they've been wanting to for some time but are only just now in a place they feel they can visit you for a week. We were all planning to, like... meet up, I guess."

George paused, tilting his head in thought. He reached out for Dream's hand almost like an afterthought, and Dream laced their fingers together. Neither needed to put any thought into that now. "If Punz suggests a pub, don't listen to him. He doesn't know what he's talking about. But if Ponk recommends one, it's probably safe to go and enjoy yourself."

Dream laughed at that, the bundle of nerves dissipating.

George chuckled along but glanced towards him. "What?"

"Out of all the things you could've told me about this, you tell me about the pubs? I was waiting for you to, like, tell me I shouldn't go or to give them your love or some sappy thing like that, and you tell me about the *pubs*?"

"It's very important, okay? Punz's taste in beer sucks."

"And yours is better somehow?"

"No, that's why I said to follow Ponk's guidance. God, it's like you don't even listen to me, Dream. I'm saying very reasonable things here." George flopped back against his seat with a warmer smile as Dream's laughter faded. "But really, I'm happy you're getting along with my friends. You're all important people to me."

Dream chuckled at that, the weight on his heart lightening. "You've said that before, you know what I'll say again."

"Don't say it—"

"I'm your favorite, right?"

George sighed as Dream laughed, and Dream would pretend he didn't see the smile tugging at his lips.

Punz [22:10] hey you want me to bring cod black ops or battlefield?

This text came with the implication he and Punz were meeting up soon, and Dream wasn't sure how he felt about such a bold assumption.

Dream looked up from his spot on the bed.

George sat in Dream's seat in front of the computer with a pair of headphones wrapped around his head. He screamed and laughed into the mic, and just by overhearing for thirty minutes, Dream could tell he was playing on Hypixel on Sapnap. Dream didn't want to interrupt whatever was happening there, lest he be pulled into some petty argument.

Dream glanced back down at his phone and typed out a response.

Dream [22:11] for what?

Punz [22:11] oh are you not going to our reunion thing? ponk said you were

Oh. Right. Dream didn't know why he couldn't tell from context clues.

Dream [22:11] im going, yeah

Dream [22:12] and i guess you can bring either one? its your stuff man

Punz [22:12] i mean

Punz [22:12] george and i played a lot of black ops together

Punz [22:12] you ok with me bringing that?

Dream stopped before he could thoughtlessly type out a yes.

Punz played that game with George. Punz played that game with *George!* Punz had grown from someone who lied about using a burner phone to scare him to someone who trusted him to play what was clearly a game close to his heart with him.

Punz trusted him so much. Everyone trusted him so much. George trusted him so much.

He'd be wrong to let them down, even if the thought of saying goodbye to George still made his heart twist and turn and the thought of being alone again made him so sick to his stomach he wanted to throw up.

Dream shook off the fuzziness in his vision as he typed back a yes. He glanced over to George.

George, who had fallen so perilously from the sky that day. George, who didn't deserve to die so early. George, who Dream loved so dearly it scared him how deeply he could love someone.

He needed to do this for him. He would do this for him.

Alone

Chapter Notes

so tagging a content warning would be a major spoiler. if you want to know what the warning is, click on the hyperlink where ao3 takes you to see more notes. the warning will be listed in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream had begun these two dizzy weeks with what he knew best: working. He wasn't in a place yet where he could upload spontaneously without the YouTube algorithm fucking him up; it was only right to his fans that he have something scheduled to upload during the trip. So he had spent a couple days recording with Sapnap, then shut himself in his room editing. (Of course, George had forced him out a couple of times, but his mind had always wandered back to where he needed to cut, where he needed music, where a scene needed to end.)

He only recognized his mistake after he finished saving both videos to his computer. He had gone from isolating himself in his room to spending every second of his day with George: playing games with him, pretending to have fallen asleep cuddled up to his side, making meals to share. George had melted under the affection, even taking the time to change into his human form for Dream.

But with each day that passed...

Dream hit the print button on his plane tickets, the grateful look George sent him only making him feel worse.

George couldn't muster up the energy to morph between forms anymore. They couldn't board the plane together like they had planned, yet Dream found himself buying two tickets anyway. The thought of George not being by his side even spiritually while they flew was enough to make his stomach turn.

"Are you really okay with this, Dream?" George asked quietly. "I know it's a bit unfair of me to ask you to do something like this. I can always go alone—"

Dream shook his head. "No. You've always been there for me, so I'll be there for you. What kind of..."

Boyfriend? Lover? Partner? All those terms hung in the air, the pause afterwards almost like a question mark.

But not all questions needed to be answered. Some things weren't meant to be defined.

George relaxes with his back against the bedframe and a closed book against his lap. His wings spread out enough to cover the width of the bed, and Dream was instantly reminded of how impossibly soft they were. "Thank you."

Dream nodded. He wanted to make a quip about having already dropped off Patches at his mother's place, but it didn't feel right.

His throat felt dry as he glanced over at the whirring printer beside him.

The rest went unsaid.

“Enough clothes for two weeks?”

“Check. And I can always buy more if I need to.”

“Money?”

“Yup.”

“All your hygiene things?”

“Yeah, but not like you would know.”

Dream laughed as George pouted and tossed a tiny bottle of shampoo at him.

Packing everything had been some of the most fun Dream had had over this past week. They had started off with some checklist they had taken off a travel website, then George had insisted he carry a couple extra things in his suitcase. Dream had countered by throwing random shit in his suitcase, and here they were now after everything had calmed down.

“I was plenty clean enough when I lived, and I’m plenty clean enough now,” George grumbled.

“Are you done with packing or not?”

Dream rolled his eyes as he zipped up the suitcase. “Jeez, okay, Mom. I’m done.”

“Really? I’ve been with you for more than a year now and this is the first time you’ve ever thought to call me Mum?”

“You want me to call you that?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Okay, Mom.”

The glare George directed at him only made him laugh harder, and for a moment, Dream let himself forget about everything and revel in this moment.

The trip to the airport and through all the security systems and check-ins was a blur. It was as if Dream had removed his consciousness from his head, floated through the system like a ghost, only for his mind to return to him after it’s past the point of no return.

The chatter of families, business partners, friends was drowned out by the static in his head. It felt like he had been dunked underwater, the sound bouncing off the water’s reflection with only the faintest echoes making its way back to him. But no matter how much he scrambled for air, something pushed his head back down.

When he anchored himself back to reality, he found himself staring out the window aimlessly and George giving him a concerned look. Dream only laughed.

Was this how George felt all those years he spent roaming the planet? Disconnected from everything, isolated from the world, so utterly, pathetically alone? It shouldn't have taken him this long to realize it. What kind of person was he?

The feelings bubbled in Dream's gut as George quietly asked him if he was feeling alright.

Dream waved him off but held his hand out on the armrest separating them.

George took his hand and squeezed it reassuringly.

He felt safe. George felt safe.

Dream shut his eyes.

He was making the right decision; he was sure of it. So why did he feel so empty?

Their plane landed without a hitch, Dream was thankful for that much. But maybe he should've done his research on the London train system before finding himself standing along the walls of a train station like an idiot. He knew he'd look even more like an idiot talking to himself, but he couldn't bring himself to care about strangers' opinions. Not now.

"So," Dream said to George's growing smirk, "I kind of thought I'd be relying on you a lot more."

George burst out laughing.

"Hey! Is that an unreasonable assumption to make?"

"Yeah, considering I haven't been here for years. Did you not think the train would change in all that time?"

Dream shoved George to the side, rolling his eyes. He could ignore the grin tugging at his lips. "You're such an idiot."

"You're the one who went running headfirst into the train station. I'd say you're the idiot here."

"Well—" Dream had to admit he had no defense against that. He settled for huffing and turning away from him. "It couldn't have changed *that* much. Are you gonna help me or not?"

"Nope."

"What?"

"We've still got plenty of time before the day ends," George said. "I'm kinda curious how long it takes you to get around the city."

Dream opened his mouth to retort, but George gave him a strange smile. It wasn't sad, it wasn't happy; it was a smile as full of mysteries as when they had first met. Only now, Dream had enough information to interpret it.

It was a smile asking for more time. More time feeling human or more time with Dream, he didn't know, but Dream would be more than willing to provide it.

So Dream sighed and turned back towards the card station. "We'd better get going if we wanna make it before night falls then."

George nodded, and the two disappeared into the crowd.

"George, I'm going to kill you."

"I'm already dead, what can you do?"

Dream grumbled underneath his breath as he pulled the suitcase handle back up. He narrowed his eyes at the hand approaching the—

And George pushed it back down again. Somehow, he was reminded of a cat.

Dream pulled it up.

George pushed it down.

Dream pulled it up.

George pushed it down again.

Dream pulled the handle up, waited, then grabbed George's hand when it approached.

George stopped. Before Dream could apologize and pull his hand away, he laced their fingers together and gazed at him with an affectionate smile Dream almost melted under.

"If you wanted to hold hands, you could've just told me," Dream said, squeezing their connected hands tighter.

George shrugged and held on as they waited for the train.

Dream waited, ignoring the gazes burning into his back.

All they saw was a man with two suitcases talking to himself and holding the air, but Dream saw the person he loved most. The world could stare all it wanted.

After all, everyone standing at this station at them would forget about Dream in one day, one week, one month. Dream would remember George forever.

Dream squinted at a map, but moving his face closer towards the glass screen didn't do much to help clarify any of the stupid squiggly lines on it.

"Having some trouble there?" George laughed.

“Shut up.”

“Sorry, George, you have to be this tall to board the train.”

George huffed and pushed him aside, stepping forward before Dream could keep bullying him.

Finally, *finally*, the last train stopped at their destination. Dream dragged his suitcases out of the train and walked forward with George beside him.

The fresh air outside was a relief compared to the dusty, stale air of the underground. They were in a suburban area of the city now, tucked away from the scrutiny of others and the almost claustrophobic buildings in the city. And even if the suitcases occasionally bumped into a pebble on the sidewalk or fell into a crevice, Dream would say this was his favorite part of what little he had seen of London so far.

“I used to come here a lot,” George said among the peaceful silence. It was nearing night now, the sun just barely maintaining its hold over nighttime. If he looked closely, he could see golden streaks in George’s brown hair.

“Oh, yeah?” Dream prompted.

“Yeah. The city’s not really a great place for a kid to grow up, you know? Whenever we wanted to get some fresh air, Mum would take me and my friends here to play for a couple hours.” He paused. “Not sure how she felt about me never going outside when I became a teenager, but that’s on her.”

And it was only then Dream realized George had met (well, had one-sided meetings anyway) every member of his family, but George had never talked about his family much, if at all. With a falling heart, he asked, “Do you miss your family?”

George answered with a shrug. “Sure. But I think it’s mostly normalcy I missed, and you were the one to give me that normalcy.” He stopped to take a turn. Now, it seemed he was leading Dream more than Dream was leading him. “I think my father died, though. Just a couple years after I did.”

“How do you know?”

“I don’t. But I feel it. I’m not sure it’s something I could know while I’m still down here anyway.”

“Oh.” Dream wanted to slap himself for that poor excuse of a reaction, but he didn’t know how he was supposed to respond anyway. “Does that mean you’ll see him again.”

George smiled. “As a matter of fact, I will. When I go back up today, I think I’ll go say hi. And tell him how much of a simp you are. Though if he’s up there, he’ll probably already know.”

Dream coughed at that, stifling his laughter. “You’re the worst.”

George had no such sense to cover up his laughter and cackled. “Any truers?”

“None.”

“Trueeee—oh, we’re here.”

Dream looked up.

Indeed, they were. Beyond the archway above them, gravestones were littered all across the field. The trees planted in rows were barren with only the slightest hint of growth tracing their branches. Yet despite the barrenness of the landscape, bright, beautiful bouquets were set in front of a couple tidy gravestones. Others were covered up by the tall grass, its marks faded long ago and its owners no longer in this realm for perhaps even longer.

Fuck. They were here.

“Which one’s yours?” Dream asked, as if they weren’t talking about death.

George’s eyes flittered over row after row of gravestones before walking towards the curved marble structure in the ground. “This one.”

They sat in front of the structure, taking a closer look.

The grass around the gravestone wasn’t quite tidy but not abandoned either. A couple blades of grass poked out above the rest of the sea, as if vying for whoever could reach the sun the fastest. The words on the gravestone were on the cleaner end of things with just a couple dirt spots near the bottom of the stone.

“Hey, look at that,” George chuckled. “They didn’t forget me after all.”

And they hadn’t. The gravestone had been cared for through all these years, just not meticulously so.

“And they remembered I only wanted my name there. Not any of that sentimental shit. I wonder who arranged it all in the end.”

Dream stared at the gravestone, then it hit him.

George was dead. George was leaving, and there was nothing either of them could do about it. No more shared meals, no more lingering touches, no more cuddles on the couch, no more fawning over Patches together, no more late night talks, no more teasing jokes. No more *George*.

Fuck.

“You’re gone,” Dream said. “You’ve always been gone.”

The smile on George’s face slipped off. “Dream—”

Dream’s throat tightened as he flipped through memory after memory. “This never should have happened. This never—I…”

He had been so foolishly optimistic. So, so foolish.

But George met him with a challenging gaze. “But it did anyway. And when you think about it, is anything meant to happen? Were you meant to meet Sappap? Were you meant to start a career on YouTube? Was I meant to die all those years ago on that bus?” George picked up Dream’s hand

with such gentleness he could've cried. "I don't know. None of us know. But even if they weren't meant to happen, they still happened. And there's a kind of beauty in it all, looking back."

"Dude, what the fuck does that mean?"

George rolled his eyes and flicked him on the forehead, but his smile was just as comforting as ever. "It means even if we weren't meant to be together forever, I'm happy this happened. I'm so happy I got the chance to meet you and see how amazing you are and fall deeper in love with you every day. Not everyone gets that privilege, you know."

"You're the amazing one, you stupid—" Dream cut himself off to steady his voice. He took a deep breath. He couldn't talk in this state. "You literally gave me my life. I was so sick of working in that stupid company, having too much time to myself, being *alone*, then you just show up in my life and fix all of that for me."

"You fixed it yourself. All I did was present an alternative."

Looking back, neither of them were quite correct in that. Dream had been the one to put in the work to make his dreams come true, but George had been the one to push him towards that dream, help him realize it was a tangible goal he could actually achieve. He might've gotten there in the end without George, but how long would that have taken? How much more misery could he have tolerated?

"And I know it sounds kind of stupid since I'm dead anyway," George said, "but you're the one who gave me *my* life back. The most human I felt wasn't in the middle of the city with all the other humans; it was by your side. Sometimes I would even forget I was dead, and when I remembered..." He trailed off at that with a frown. "Well, it was never nice remembering. But making me feel so alive I forgot I was dead—that's just awesome."

"And it's only through you that I could get to this point in the first place. I told you about how I spent my afterlife looking for a reason to never move on, blaming myself for everything that happened. I don't know how long it would've taken me to figure it out without you. I'm not sure I would've ever figured it out."

Dream swallowed at that. That was bleak. Thinking about George roaming the world, unsure of his purpose and wrapped up in self-hatred...

He didn't want to think about that. Anything but that.

More light radiated around them now. When Dream looked up, he swore the clouds had moved from their previous position.

Dream's throat tightened as he said, "But you're still dead. And you're leaving and dying again." The dread knotted in his stomach in larger and larger clumps until all he could feel was the dread pushing against his chest. There was a familiar wetness building behind his eyes, but before Dream could preemptively wipe them away, George reached out to cup his cheek.

God, this was the weakest he had ever felt in his life. He could feel himself shaking even as he leaned into George's touch.

"You know, there's this thing Bad always told us when we lost someone," George said, his voice dropped to almost a whisper. "He told us that nobody ever truly dies. As long as we remember, a part of that person stays alive in this world, even if our physical remains disappear. What do you think about that?"

Dream pursed his lips as his thoughts wandered back to the world George's friends had created.

He had to admit some part of it was true. George's friends had already been keeping his memory alive through that world, storing every picture, description, memory in it. Even long after Minecraft's most popular era, after every one of their friends moved on, the world would undoubtedly be stored in a flash drive somewhere, carrying just a tiny piece of George. And that was what Dream had been doing with his videos, wasn't it? The thanks to George at the end of all of his video descriptions was imbued with the spirit of one George and one George only. George was still very much alive in the mortal realm, keeping watch over his most loved ones and the world shaping around his presence.

But it was all George could leave of him: a piece, fragments scattered all over the world. Dream had grown so used to having all of George with him. Was he selfish for wanting to keep it?

Dream's gaze darted from the thin skin underneath George's eyes to the brightening sky. George waited for his answer, his shoulders seemingly burdened by the experiences that came from such a compressed life.

He was selfish. He was so selfish.

He couldn't keep George down here when there was peace waiting for him. And no matter how much he wanted to think otherwise, George would never find peace with him. There was no doubt he had made the right decision, but it hurt so much.

The heat behind his eyes was pushing more and more. Before he knew it, the tears were out and he was sobbing. Every inch of him shook, and all the longing, the love he had stored in his heart for George came pouring out.

"Dream," George called, setting his hands on Dream's shoulders like an anchor. He sniffed, and when Dream looked up, tears were running down George's face like comets. "Listen to me. I'm not leaving you. When I gave you my love, I gave you all of me there was to give. And my love is staying with you forever."

Dream wiped his eyes, but the tears continued streaming stubbornly. "I know! I know what you mean, and I agree. But that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt. It hurts so much. You had years to prepare for this. I had a couple months."

"I know. I'm sorry, but..." He paused to wrap Dream in an embrace, his wings enveloping them in their own universe. "There'll be a day when it hurts less, and there'll be another day when it hurts even less than that. You'll move on, and you'll be able to live without me. It took me years to come to terms with my own death, Dream. You can't expect yourself to not be hurt about it."

"I know. It just... It hurts a lot."

George stopped. "Do you regret it?"

"What?"

"Do you regret any of this? All of it, even?"

"No." The answer came immediately, and it came from Dream's heart. "How could—you're such an idiot, George. I could never regret loving you."

"Then I don't regret it either." George paused to hug him tighter, and Dream noted with a sickening feeling in his chest that George had no heartbeat. "You know, I know it was resolution I was

seeking all this time. But wouldn't it be funny if what I was really meant to get was your love?"

Dream had to chuckle at that. "You're so stupid."

"It's just a thought. But either way, I have it, and that's all I need to face whatever's happening next to me. And you have my love. As long as you're alive, I'm alive with you. I'm so happy to love you," George said. He pulled away and tucked a strand of hair behind Dream's ear, his smile just as angelic as ever.

The clouds above them had moved to make room for the sunlight. Streaks of light glowed over the gravestone. Heaven was reaching down to reclaim one of its angels, and Dream wouldn't interfere.

"I love you," Dream croaked as the two stood up, their hands connected. "I love you, I love you, I love you. I'll always love you."

A beautiful blush fell over George's face at that. "I love you, too, Dream. More than I ever thought I could love." He turned. "Oh, my father's coming down the steps for me."

Dream swore he could make out the outline of a man with wings slowly floating towards them. "He is?"

"Yeah. I'll introduce you two one day."

"Promise?"

"Promise." Then George shuffled his feet and chuckled nervously. "Can I kiss you before I go?"

Dream's face flushed despite himself. His heart fluttered as if he were back in grade school about to ask his crush out. "Of course."

George hesitated, looked away, then pressed a soft, shy kiss against Dream's lips before pulling away.

Dream reached up to touch his lips with his other hand.

That was love. It wasn't long, it wasn't passionate, but it was filled with as much love as George could convey with one action, and that was enough for Dream. It only registered then that that had been their first and last kiss.

George glanced back at the skies before giving Dream one last adoring smile. "Thank you for everything, Dream. I'll see you later."

Right. It wasn't the end.

Dream nodded and gulped as George's fingers slipped from his hand. He missed them already. "Yeah. I'll see you later."

Then George turned, blending more and more into the skies with each step. Dream didn't think he had ever seen a more serene expression on his face as he floated closer and closer to the light, nor had he seen more beautiful of a man. Step by step, his figure disappeared more into the heavens. By the time he reached the top, Dream could only barely make out an outline of him.

Finally, George was at peace. Dream got the feeling things were back in their rightful place.

And just like that, the clouds swallowed up the light, and the air stilled.

The sun was gone.

The warmth was gone.

George was gone, and Dream was alone.

Dream's gaze fell on the gravestone.

Don't cry, Dream, Dream told himself, biting his trembling lip. Something twisted in his gut. Don't cry. He's not gone. You'll see him again.

But it was too much. It was all too much too soon.

Dream collapsed on the ground, his body wracked with sobs. He brought his knees up to his chest and tucked his face as close to himself as he could, but the warmth wouldn't ever come close to what George had given him. If he listened closely, he could hear his cries piercing through what had otherwise been peaceful air. His heart bled as reality sunk in with its unyielding teeth.

Only this time, there were no wings to block out the judgement of the world.

Chapter End Notes

cw: character death

it's not over yet.

Heavenstruck

Chapter Notes

12k words. last chapter. lets go. mind the tags and warnings please.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Eternity passed.

Dream didn't remember when he had run out of tears or when the sobs wracking his body had died down, but when he anchored himself back to reality, the sun's edge touched the horizon. The tears he was sure had fallen on the knees of his jeans were dry now, leaving behind a new staleness to the fabric. Every limb felt heavy from his head to his toes. It was as if Earth itself was pulling him down, keeping him chained away from George.

His gaze fell on the gravestone in front of him.

George was dead. Nothing would change that.

Before he could slip back into blankness, somebody cleared their throat behind him.

"Um... excuse me?"

Dream's shoulders tensed. Wasn't it an unspoken rule to leave people alone at cemeteries?

He turned around anyway.

The man behind him was possibly the most unthreatening human he had ever encountered. His glasses were slid down as far as it could go down the bridge of his nose, and the blue hoodie he wore swallowed his torso, upper thighs, and hands. He stood tall, but it was clearly to compensate for the lack of height otherwise.

"Hi," Dream hazarded, now aware of the wrinkles in his shirt, the puffiness in his eyes, the dirt on his pants. Still, he didn't move. He didn't have the energy.

The man crouched down next to him like a teacher would next to a kid on the playground. "Was George your friend?"

What a loaded question and an understatement. What could he say to that?

After floundering for a satisfactory answer, Dream nodded.

"Yeah, he was my best friend," the man said, almost sighed. He turned to Dream with a smile that exuded kindness and held a hand out. "And any friend of George's is a friend of mine."

Best friend.

Best friend.

As in—

Dream's heart dropped.

George's best friend was in front of him. George's best friend had seeked out his grave, remembered him fondly, and treated anyone associated with him well even after all these years.

George's best friend was an angel. Not quite the same type of angel as George, but an angel nonetheless.

Dream shook his hand. Where had his voice gone? Where had his words gone? "Nice to meet—"

There was a forearm in his hand. He was carrying a forearm. He was carrying a metal forearm, a forearm that had been attached to the person in front of him.

Dream looked up when the man snickered and took the forearm back.

"I love doing that trick," he chuckled. "Best idea Geppy's ever had." He sat down properly on the ground and set his metal forearm in his lap before pulling his hoodie up just enough to reveal emptiness where a forearm would be. He began putting his arm back in place. "Don't worry, you didn't break my arm, silly. It's a prosthetic from... Well, if you're George's friend, you know what."

And he did. Memories of tires screeching, metal creaking, people screaming flashed through his head.

"Just thought you could use a smile," the man said, holding his other arm out. "My name's Bad."

Dream huffed out a laugh and shook his hand in proper. "I'm Dream. I've heard good things about you."

Good things? He was lying to himself. He had heard amazing things. And if his instincts were right, those amazing things were still true.

Bad's eyes lit up at that. "Oh, you're Dream! Ponk and the others talk so much about you."

"Hopefully good things," Dream joked.

"Absolutely. Ponk and Callahan are here already. We're still waiting on Punz and Alyssa. Do you want to wait with us or, uh..." Bad cocked his head towards the gravestone. "Would you rather stay for a bit? Your choice."

Dream turned back towards the gravestone, running his gaze across the name embedded in the stone.

George was here. He was still with him, everywhere and forever.

"Let's stay here for a bit," Dream said quietly.

Instead of answering with words, Bad shifted to sit cross-legged next to him and shut his eyes. He stayed unperturbed by the winds that kicked up around them.

He looked peaceful. Dream wanted peace, too.

So Dream took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

If he imagined hard enough, he could feel George's arms around him.

It felt strange being back at the airport so soon.

Dream tugged on the sleeves of his hoodie, slouching with one hand dragging his suitcase behind him. Whether that was because of the exhaustion or because of the weight of the world suddenly becoming only his burden to bear, he didn't know.

Bad said nothing about it, though. Instead, he made idle conversation about topics from his server to what lunch they had eaten today. It was just enough to keep Dream's mind chugging but casual enough for no pressure to bubble.

But Bad thought Dream was George's friend from before his death. Ponk, Alyssa, Callahan, Punz—they thought the same. How long would it take for them to unravel his lies? If Bad knew the truth, would he laugh and accept him all the same or leave Dream where he stood?

"Oh, finally," Bad huffed, swatting away Dream's thoughts. "Took those muffins long enough. Ponk, Callahan, over here!"

A man Dream recognized as Ponk emerged from the crowd, dragging another man by the wrist with him. The man met Dream's gaze and rolled his eyes as if to say, "Can you believe this guy?"

Dream had to smile at that. So that was Callahan.

"You're the one who wandered away from us," Ponk said. His gaze settled on Dream and immediately softened. "Oh, Bad, you didn't tell us you were bringing a friend. What's your name, man?"

Oh, right. He had never shown any of them a picture of him, did he?

"I'm Dream," Dream said. Amusement bubbled in his throat when Ponk and Callahan's eyes widened.

Ponk's jaw dropped as Bad burst into a fit of giggles beside them. "Dude! Bad didn't tell me he ran into *you!*"

"You didn't ask," Bad snickered.

The surprise on Ponk's face softened into a happy, fond grin, and he held his arms open. "Come on, bring it in. It's so nice to finally see you, man."

Dream leaned into the hug. Ponk was friendly, affectionate, trusting. He had a sarcastic edge to him, but he found that the majority of this friend group did, nor was that something to be ashamed of. Dream had lied to him—Dream had lied to *all* of them. And no matter how warm the hug was, the pit of disgust at himself growing in his gut couldn't be ignored.

When Ponk pulled away, Callahan grinned and offered him a wave.

Dream smiled and waved back despite it all. "Hey, Callahan. Nice to meetcha."

Callahan gave him a thumbs up in response.

"How long have you guys been waiting?" Dream asked, swallowing his doubts and shutting the

door on his thoughts. He could feel bad about himself later. Above all, George would want Dream to be happy, even if he lied his way into friendships with people who didn't deserve it.

(Though George definitely knew Dream would be happier with him by his side. He knew, and he left anyway. But it wasn't his fault. Dream had to hold onto that.)

"A couple hours now," Bad answered after a flicker of his eyes to the watch on his wrist.

Ponk snorted at that. "Yeah, Punz said he and Alyssa were making the trip overseas together, so I thought maybe they'd keep each other more accountable."

"I mean, I'm not sure sending off the two most irresponsible people in the group to fly on a plane together was the best idea."

"You talking shit?" came two familiar voices.

Dream turned, only to see Punz and Alyssa standing side by side with their suitcases.

"Did you really just say the same thing as me?" Alyssa said, screwing her nose. "Stop that."

Punz looked to be at a loss for words before he glared and said, "I said it first, not you. Can you stop causing problems on purpose?"

"No, I said it first!"

"*I* said it first!"

"You're both late, fuckers," Ponk interjected, cutting their argument short as the two turned towards him.

Bad muttered out a "Language," though it went ignored. Dream gave him a consolation nod.

Callahan gave Ponk a hard nudge to the side. Ponk glared, presumably to curse him out, but blinked upon realizing what Callahan was trying to communicate and redirected his gaze to the others.

"Everyone's here now," Ponk said, picking up the one suitcase Punz had brought with him (and pointedly ignoring Punz's protest). "Can we head to my place now? I've spent way too long in this place today."

Punz frowned. "I thought Dream was coming. Shouldn't we wait for him?"

"Yeah. We have *everyone*."

Dream shuffled his feet, bracing himself for whatever reaction he would get.

It took a moment for that to process, but when it did—

"Dream!" Alyssa squealed. There was a radiant grin on her face, and she held her arms out for him. "You promised me a hug!"

And how could Dream not?

Dream wrapped his arms around Alyssa, wincing a bit at the sheer strength behind the hug. Punz chuckled knowingly and set a hand on his shoulder.

“Careful there, we don’t want Dream spending the whole week in the hospital,” Punz said. But even with his words, he joined the hug. “Welcome to the group, brother.”

He was too kind. Everyone was too kind.

Dream stayed in the hug, relishing in the warmth he didn’t deserve.

Somehow through enough cajoling after a shared dinner at a local fast food chain, the group of five had managed to get Dream to stay in Ponk’s apartment for the week.

“God, the jet lag’s real,” Punz cursed, holding his head. He took the Advil pill Bad handed him with a thankful nod and popped it into his mouth.

Sleeping bags were rolled out on the floor of the living room. Ponk had already moved the coffee table forward and pushed the couch back in preparation at the start of the day, but it was still a cramped enough space that Punz’s sleeping bag spilled out onto the floor of the kitchen. Dream, having been the only person to not bring a sleeping bag (and really, how could he have predicted this would happen?), was assigned to sleep on the couch for the week. Ponk opted to sleep in his own bed, citing Bad’s snoring issues as the reason why, to which Bad vehemently denied.

The lights were turned down now. Dream squished himself in the confines of the couch, careful to not let his blankets fall on anyone’s feet.

“God, this is gonna be hell,” Ponk grumbled as Callahan stepped out of the bathroom.

Callahan only shrugged in response, as if to point out this was his idea in the first place.

“I tell you this every year,” Bad said, shaking his head. “If you need us to get a hotel for the week, we’d find one.”

“Nah, that’d be even worse.”

“How so?”

Ponk didn’t answer, instead focusing his attention on pouring freshly-brewed tea into six different cups. Dream got the feeling everyone knew the answer anyway.

Punz snorted when Ponk handed him a cup. “God, you’re so British.”

“Do you want the tea or not?”

“Nah,” Punz said, keeping the cup out of Ponk’s reach and taking a sip from it. He turned to “Anyway, you gonna tell us the itinerary, Bad?”

Bad blinked at that before giving them a smile, a smile Dream couldn’t help but recognize as the cheeky one George would make when he knew something Dream didn’t. “That’s for me to know and for you to find out.”

Callahan elbowed him as he slinked into his sleeping bag between Bad and Alyssa, earning a laugh out of him.

“Hey, don’t look at me like that. You guys put me in charge of this every year and you never learn your lesson.”

“That’s it,” Ponk said. “Dream’s in charge next year.”

Dream’s heart tightened at that as everyone around him laughed. It was a joke, but it was one that worked on the assumption Dream was here to stay at least for the next year, maybe even forever.

It’s all based on a lie, his heart whispered to him like the traitor it was. Maybe so. That didn’t mean their bond was fake.

So when Ponk handed him a cup of tea and Alyssa set up a movie on her laptop for the six of them to squeeze together to watch, Dream kept his eyes closed, thinking only of the love that had bonded all of them together.

Yet the tea still tasted bitter.

As it turned out, the first item on the agenda for the next day was a watch party of all the Harry Potter movies. And with every watch party, snacks and drinks were almost a requirement.

So why they decided to send Dream and Callahan to pick them up was beyond him.

“Does anybody have a nut allergy?” Dream asked, holding up a box of chocolate almonds.

Callahan opened his mouth to respond, then shut it and looked down in thought. After a few seconds of thinking, he shrugged.

“How do you not—Well, okay.” Dream set the box of chocolate almonds back on the shelf. Better not to take any risks.

Even after reassurance that nobody in the group had any significant allergies, Dream still found himself walking on eggshells. Callahan had already done his rounds throughout the store for specific snacks he knew were each person’s favorites, and Dream had already put a couple snacks for himself in the cart. All that was left were various other snacks that had to last the whole group of six for the entire week. That was no easy feat.

“I mean, do we really need to be in this section?” Dream asked. His gaze flickered from shelf to shelf, but none of the store’s abnormally large selection of chocolate-covered foods looked appealing. “Chocolate-covered stuff is more of a dessert thing than anything.”

The way Callahan’s nose scrunched at that told Dream he clearly didn’t have the same opinion, but he nodded anyway.

Dream moved to push the cart into another aisle, then stopped.

There was a stock of chocolate raisins at the very end of the aisle, surrounded by stock of other more popular chocolate-covered foods. Unsurprisingly, the stock was completely full.

George’s favorite snack. He had mentioned it offhandedly a couple of times. Dream had never taken notice of it until now.

A hand set itself on his shoulder, pulling him back into reality. When the fabric of reality knitted itself back together around him, Dream found the jar of chocolate raisins in his hands and the hand on his shoulder to be Callahan's.

The hand was warm, reassuring, kind. But it would never compare to the comfort from George's wing wrapped around him. Nothing ever would.

Callahan took the jar out of his hands and placed it in the shopping cart.

Dream cleared his throat before pushing the cart out of the aisle.

Dream liked his fair share of movies, but twenty hours of movie-watching was too much for even the people with the strongest wills.

"Oh my god, my head hurts," Dream muttered, holding his head.

Next to him, Alyssa rolled her eyes and nudged his shoulder. "You want an Advil, old man?"

"Yeah."

"Well, okay." With that, Alyssa stood up from her spot on the couch and stepped over Bad and Callahan's bodies to make her way to the kitchen. "Tablet or pill?"

Dream blinked but looked down at his cup, now devoid of the soda it had been filled with previously. Pills weren't great to take half-awake. "Tablet, I guess."

A cabinet opened in the distance with the speed of a trained headache expert.

It was three in the morning now, the sun fully tucked away behind the horizon and the blank laptop screen providing the only light in the room. The door to Ponk's bedroom was shut, but his snores were audible from the couch Dream sat on in the living room. Callahan, Bad, and Punz had been knocked out for a while; if he recalled correctly, they had started dropping around midnight. Punz managed to stay awake the longest out of everyone, falling asleep around two in the morning.

It was silent. Dream wasn't used to silence.

Eventually, Alyssa tip-toed her way back to her spot on the couch next to Dream. She held out the tablet without a word.

"Thanks," Dream said, taking the tablet. He popped it into his mouth and chewed. "You're not getting one for yourself?"

Alyssa shrugged at that. "I mean, I don't really need it."

"You're telling me you spent twenty hours looking at a screen without flinching? Kids these days..." He chuckled when Alyssa elbowed him, muffling the noise behind a hand. He'd let everyone else get their rest. "Seriously though, how is your head not dying?"

"Maybe you're just weak."

"Maybe so, but still."

“There’s no secret to it. I just do this a lot. My eyes don’t like me, but I don’t like my eyes either, so it’s all right,” Alyssa said. She pulled the laptop up, placing the bottom on a pillow on her lap. The laptop couldn’t have been comfortable to touch given how long it had been running. “George and I used to do this a lot, actually.”

Something in the air shifted at that, but Alyssa seemed willing to talk about it, so Dream pressed on. “Oh, really?”

“Yeah. You know, with his programming and American sleep schedule and everything. He’d stay up doing work, and I’d stay up doing whatever.” She laughed at that. “I don’t even remember anymore. We stayed up to stupid times, though. Sometimes one of the other three would join us, but it was mostly just our thing.”

Dream smiled at memories of staying up until sunrise working, talking to George, messing around with Sapnap over call. After Dream quit his day job, there wasn’t a single day he went to sleep at a reasonable time. Late night was the most peaceful time of day, after all. He wouldn’t miss it for the world.

Alyssa continued. “He helped me a lot during those nights, actually. When I needed help with my homework, when I was having problems at work, just... when I needed someone to talk to. I remember him listening to me a lot, but I don’t remember a lot of times I listened to him. I regret that sometimes. I regret it so much. It’s ridiculous, but—”

“No, I get that,” Dream said. George had listened to everything from his childhood stories about Patches to his frustrations with his day job. Logically Dream knew he had extended the same courtesy to George, but logic didn’t always correlate with emotions. “I get that, yeah.”

He winced at the crack in his voice, but Alyssa didn’t comment on it, just like how Dream didn’t comment on her wiping an eye.

“I can’t believe you’re playing video games first thing in the morning.”

Punz rolled his eyes and held out another controller. “Don’t lie, you’ve done the same thing before. Now, sit your ass down and play some Black Ops with me.”

Well, Dream couldn’t argue with that. He had spent many a morning waking up, powering on his computer, and proceeding to play Minecraft for twelve hours. He took the offered controller and sat down next to Punz.

While eight in the morning was a reasonable time to wake up for most people, Dream didn’t think anyone in the friend group could be considered reasonable. Their friends were still sleeping, as far as Dream knew, and likely wouldn’t be up until noon.

That being said, he had no clue why Punz was awake, nor how long he had to have been awake to track down a television screen and set up his PlayStation.

“Where the hell did you get a TV?” Dream asked as Punz navigated through the game menu.

“Well, I knew Ponk had one lying around from last year. He said it was broken, but it turns out he’s just an idiot. Hooked it up to the PlayStation, got the game running, cleared the save file from

last year. And here we are now.”

“Why didn’t you say anything when we were having that movie binge?”

“Do you wanna play or not?”

Well, not his problem. Dream nodded, and the co-op mode began.

Playing another game after focusing his attention on Minecraft for so long felt awkward, like he had forgotten all control of his fingers. His movements were clumsy, his aim uncertain. He had walked straight into a mob of zombies a couple times, though the only grief Punz gave him over it was a snicker. It didn’t take long for them to finish the mission together (especially with Punz leading the way with the confidence of somebody who had replayed this mission many, many times), but Dream’s mouth tugged into a smile at the ending screen.

Dream whirled around, ready to shout his accomplishment to the best person in his life—

No one was there.

Right.

Dream turned back around and cleared his throat, ready to pretend like he was stretching his back. “Hey, we finally finished.”

But instead of laughing along, Punz only offered him a sympathetic smile.

“I get it,” he said. “Back when we played together, I had the game screen in front of me and all my friends’ facecams on my second monitor. George’s facecam was always here.” Punz pointed at the top right corner of the screen. “Took me years to get out of the habit of looking straight there. Still do look sometimes. We all miss him.”

He got out of the habit. Dream had hope after all.

Not today, though. Today, his heart hurt, and nothing could alleviate it.

Punz shut the console off and disconnected it from the television set. He set his controller down on the table, standing up. “Here, help me make breakfast before everyone wakes up.”

Dream set his own controller down and stood up. “We’re not gonna move everything off the table?”

Punz only shrugged.

Seeing everyone slowly wake up and filter into the kitchen helped, though. Hearing Ponk spit out a string of curses at Punz for the television set and console on the table helped even more.

Dream couldn’t bring himself to quite smile, but it helped.

“What’re you two texting about?” Dream teased, taking his usual seat at the kitchen table.

Callahan and Alyssa exchanged a look, glanced at him, and giggled.

“Nothing,” Alyssa said. Callahan shrugged to match her answer, and Punz only rolled his eyes from beside them.

Huh.

Dream didn't know what the point of a scavenger hunt was if the only town local was bound to win every time, but he wouldn't complain, given he was the one paired with the town local.

“So, we're done?” Dream asked.

Ponk snorted as he checked off the last location on the list. “Yeah, pretty much. I don't know what Bad was expecting.”

It was sometime in the afternoon, Dream having lost track of both their time and location. The last location to hunt down was an obscure doner kebab place, and the two were now seated on a bench with their respective orders in hand. The group chat Dream had been added to at the beginning of the day rang with congratulations and sarcastic proclamations of being right on their tail. It seemed everyone already knew trying to win the scavenger hunt was pointless.

The area of town Bad had sketched their path in was both out of the way but not quite suburban. At this time of day, few groups of people were scattered among the streets, and business was slow. They had picked a good day for an outside adventure; the sky was cloudy but not anywhere near raining (though Dream suspected that would change tomorrow). It was easy to breathe here.

Spending a couple hours with Ponk in person hadn't been as nerve-wracking as Dream had anticipated either. Ponk was just as easy to talk to as he had been online, but now Dream could read his facial expressions better, hear his voice without the crackle of his headset. There was no replacement for human interaction. He knew that now.

“He does this every year,” Ponk said with a huff. Despite that, he laughed. “I'd stop him, but he's just so excited about it every time. I think everyone's agreed on that.”

Dream laughed along. Even with his limited time with him, he could tell Bad's enthusiasm was the contagious sort. “I mean, it was pretty fun for what it was. When's the last time any of us actually went outside anyway?”

“Oh, no, man. This is pretty much the only time any of us get any kind of exercise. It's funny, actually. The whole thing was to honor George's memory, but he probably moved the least out of all of us.”

Dream frowned at that. He had gotten the inkling that everything on this trip had to do with George's memory, but the scavenger hunt had seemed more like an excuse to go out and explore the city. “What do you mean by that?”

Ponk shrugged. “I mean, haven't you noticed? Pretty much all these places we've been sent to were George's favorite places to be.” He scooted closer to Dream with the list pulled up on his phone. “The first place we visited was the place George always got his clothes. Then we went to the entrance of our university campus, the park we used to hang out together at, the bar we had our first drinks at. And here we are now, at his favorite takeout place.”

Of course.

Pieces of George were scattered around the entire town, pieces of himself he had never had the chance to share with Dream. Yet they were familiar all the same. Dream could almost picture George grabbing the first thing he saw in the store, walking onto his university campus with a backpack strapped on, complaining about the heat under the summer sun as he walked in the park alongside Ponk, exchanging cheers with friends at a barstool, ordering takeout after a long wait in line.

Pieces of his normal life, before tragedy struck. Would George have shared that with him?

“Food’s really that good, huh?”

Dream snapped back to reality, where a line of wet coldness streaked down his cheek and Ponk held a napkin out to him.

Maybe this wasn’t a mistake after all, if it meant learning that little bit more about George.

Dream took the napkin with a smile. “Yeah. Thank you.”

Ponk nodded, and Dream had the feeling they both knew the thanks extended to something else entirely.

Dream didn’t deserve that kindness.

This was the weirdest look Ponk had given him throughout the entirety of the week, and it was over a bowl of cereal.

Dream frowned. “You okay, Ponk?”

Ponk blinked, then shook his head. “Yeah, no, I’m fine. Sorry, zoned out for a second.”

There was no reason to believe he was lying, so Dream pushed down his suspicions and shoveled a spoon of cereal in his mouth.

He dreamt of him.

Dream woke with a start, his breath and heart heavy.

George was there. He was there, standing on the path Dream had first met him so long ago. His wings were tucked behind his back and he wore the same angel-wear Dream had made fun of him for. In front of him, a shorter man with brown hair faced him. Their conversation was incoherent from where Dream stood.

Dream had willed himself to pick up his feet, yell out to them, but his body betrayed him. He stayed frozen in place, the sound of the blowing winds picking up until—

He wasn't there anymore.

Darkness fell around him. There were still three bodies lying on the floor next to him, each person in a varying state of disaster. The clock on the table to the side of him read three in the morning. Everything was still.

But there was a light in the kitchen.

Dream sat up and rubbed his eyes. He had never felt more exhausted in his life.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

Dream ripped his hands from his face, only to see Bad take a seat on the other end of the couch with two cups of water in his hands. He took the cup Bad offered to him. "Thanks."

Bad either didn't notice the croak in his voice or chose not to comment on it. Either way, he offered him the same kind smile he had been offering him through the whole week. "Why're you up so late? Ponk's snoring wake you up?"

"No, it's not that bad yet," Dream said, chuckling at the joke. He took a sip of water, and the last of the fog cleared away. "Just a weird dream."

"Dream? Having dreams? You get it?"

"Oh, haha."

Bad snickered at his own joke, though Dream got the feeling neither thought it was particularly funny. "Sorry, I had to. You wanna talk about it?"

Did he?

Bad had been nothing but kind to him throughout this entire week, and the way George had described him led Dream to believe he was nothing but kind in his everyday life. And George had so clearly trusted him with his life. Anyone dear to George was dear to Dream.

But where would he begin with a mountain of a subject that was?

Dream shrugged. "I don't know. Why're *you* up?"

"I had a pretty muffiny dream, too," Bad said with a chuckle. But he turned to face Dream, and his eyes were more serious than Dream had ever seen them. "We're all a bit concerned about you, though."

"Me?"

"Yeah. We've noticed that you've been kind of... absent, almost? You know, not all there, quiet. I know it's kind of stupid to point it out during the anniversary of our friend's death, but the others are really worried about you. Are you feeling all right?"

Dream's blood ran cold.

They had caught on. Maybe not the entire nature of why Dream had been distancing himself, but they had noticed enough.

What else was he supposed to have done, though? His only connection to them was based on a lie, and even if he told them the truth, there was no way a rational person would believe him. And just

this once, Dream cursed his friends for being smart, well-functioning people.

But it didn't feel right. This wasn't okay. Lying wasn't okay. Lying like this was an affront to his personal morals, and he wasn't sure how much longer he could go feeling so disgusting.

"I'm—" Tears welled behind his eyes, but they haven't fallen yet. He refused to allow himself that. "I met George after he died, not when he was alive."

And there it was. There was no going back now.

Bad was silent for all of two seconds. It felt like an eternity.

"Tell me more," he said.

So Dream told him everything, from the first time he met George to the last time they spent together and the moments in between. It must've taken a decade to get through everything, but Bad sat with him, patiently listening to everything he had to say. After Dream finished speaking, there was a moment of silence so quiet he'd be able to hear a twig snap outside.

That was it. He had laid himself bare for the world to judge, ready to accept whatever judgement it would brand him.

Then after an eternity, Bad laughed and looked at him with so much more warmth than he deserved. "Dream, I know."

The pin dropped. Everything shattered.

"You know?" Dream breathed.

"Well, I didn't *know* know," Bad said, "I had a feeling you weren't telling us the entire truth, though. You act like how we did three years ago when he died: withdrawing from us, looking like life isn't really in focus for you. Do you feel that way, too?"

Life wasn't in focus for him. He could barely remember what he did yesterday. He shook his head.

Bad nodded at that. "Me too. I remember going back home after George died and just..." He chuckled humorlessly. "I think it'd be more correct to say I don't remember. There's a half-year gap between me going back home and what I can remember next. All those days just felt so *gray* without George there. I think the others will tell you the same thing, too."

It was easy to forget what Bad had experienced with the cheerful front he put on. Dream nodded along, letting Bad continue.

"But you know what, Dream?" Bad lifted his head. "It doesn't matter how long it's been since you last saw him or how well you knew him. You're family now."

Dream blinked. "You believe me?"

"Of course. George never talked about knowing anyone like you when he was still alive. But last night, I had a dream—" He paused to snicker at his joke again. "I was on a road I had never seen before, but George was with me. He had some angel get-up with wings and everything. Our conversation was shorter than I would've liked, but you know what he told me?"

Dream stayed silent, and Bad smiled.

"He told me to take care of you, protect you like he did so many times. He told *us* to love you,

maybe not in the same way, but even more than he did. He made me promise it. He loved— *loves* you so much, Dream. More than one man could handle. And you know what?”

Dream’s throat tightened. He couldn’t cry now—not now. He stayed silent, not trusting himself.

Bad paused to gesture towards everyone asleep on the floor and back to Ponk’s bedroom before returning his kind gaze to Dream. “We’re more than happy to keep that promise. No matter what, you’re still our friend. And I know for sure if you told everyone else what you told me today, they’d trust you enough to believe you.”

“You don’t even know me.”

“Maybe not that well yet, but George found peace with you. If he loves you, I’m sure I’ll grow to love you in time, too. For now, though...” Bad stood up from the couch, careful to plant his feet in unoccupied space. He held his hand out. “Wanna go for a walk before everyone gets up?”

This was scary. He had everyone’s trust in his hands, more trust than he knew what to do with.

The obvious answer was to be the same person they had placed that trust in in the first place.

Dream took the hand and pulled himself up. “What am I, a dog?”

“I dunno, are you?”

And when Dream burst out in the loudest barks he knew how to make and woke up the entire apartment, he wouldn’t say he regretted a thing.

Dream had given Bad permission to tell everyone what he had told him, but nobody’s demeanor had changed. In fact, they were only more affectionate than ever.

“Dream, you coming?” Punz asked, still holding the apartment door open. In the hallway, Bad and Callahan waited while Ponk and Alyssa bickered about one thing or another. Their voices were disappearing quickly down the hall.

“Yeah,” Dream said, stuffing his phone into his pocket. He swiped the set of keys off the kitchen table before approaching the door. “Ponk forgot the keys like an idiot.”

“I heard that!” Ponk shouted.

The six of them laughed.

Dream felt he could breathe just a bit easier.

It was easy to dull the pain of George’s absence with other people constantly around him. For the next couple of days, his absence wasn’t such a heavy weight on his shoulders.

It was harder to ignore his feelings when George's gravestone was right in front of him.

Dream stilled while Ponk and Punz brushed excess debris off the gravestone. Behind him, Bad rustled a bouquet of blue flowers and Alyssa flipped through a photobook. Callahan stood silent next to him. Whether it was as a show of support to Dream or a signal of his own sombre feelings, Dream wasn't sure.

It was a cloudy day, the clouds gray and puffy. The sky looked as desolate as the land around them. The street seemed void of cars today and people too busy to take walks around the neighborhood, something Dream was grateful for.

Soon, Ponk and Punz backed away from the grave, cleaning the dirt off their hands with a pack of baby wipes. There was a joke in there somewhere Dream would've said if they weren't standing in a graveyard.

"Give it here, I'll throw it away later," Bad said. He scrunched the used baby wipes in a fist and pocketed them before kneeling down to set the bouquet on the grave. There was a moment of hesitation before he stood back up and moved beside Alyssa.

It was silent. Who knew what to say when face-to-face with death?

Bad cleared his throat and fixed a smile on his face. "Hi, George. We're back again, whether you like it or not."

"That's the same intro you've been using for three years," Punz sighed.

"Sorry about the disrespectful muffins here, George. *Some* people never learned to be polite."

With that, the dreary atmosphere over them lifted. They took turns telling George about their latest family news, their advancements in their careers, general happenings around the world they thought he'd like to know, almost talking over each other to get everything out. They laughed at each others' jokes and jabs and shot back just as cheerfully. This entire weekend had been a celebration of George's life, after all, and this was no different.

But Dream wasn't there yet. He didn't think he would ever get there.

George was gone. In his life one day, gone the next. There was nothing he could do about it.

His life would never be as happy as it had been with George in it. And that was where he shattered.

Dream sniffed, blinking back the wet warmth building behind his eyes. He couldn't ruin the moment for everyone else. He tried, he tried and tried and tried, but there were only so many emotions he could bottle up before everything exploded.

Bad turned around to him, his smile dropping. "Dream? Are you okay?"

No. And nothing ever would be.

Dream tilted his head down, wiping away the tears that streaked down his face. As everything fell silent, the only noise in the cemetery was his pitiful sobs that were simultaneously too soft and too loud.

Then somebody sniffed beside him.

Alyssa embraced him by his side, burying her face into his shoulder. She cried, too, for reasons

Dream knew he couldn't understand. He knew Alyssa could never understand his either.

Punz placed a hand on his other shoulder. He looked up to the skies with a shaking hand and wet eyes that darted from cloud to cloud, as if he were searching for George.

Next to them, Bad and Callahan held onto each other as if letting go would ruin the world around them. Occasionally, Bad lifted his hand to wipe his eyes and muttered what Dream assumed were words of comfort.

Ponk knelt down to the gravestone, pausing to soak his tears with the sleeve of his shirt. He took a deep, shaky breath and stared directly at the words engraved into the stone.

Everyone stilled, waiting.

"We miss you, brother," Ponk said. "More than you'll ever know. Rest well."

He patted the stone twice with a strained smile and stood up, pretending he wasn't shaking. Ponk glanced from person to person before his gaze fell on Bad.

Bad nodded. "We can stay here a while."

So they sat down on the ground, and they remembered.

Dream shut his eyes, holding his hands out.

George didn't take them. Punz and Alyssa did.

Home didn't feel like home anymore.

Dream stepped into his apartment. By the time he finished rolling his luggage in, Patches pitter-patted her way next to his leg and rubbed her head on the fabric of his jeans, safe like his mother had promised. His mother stepped into view just a few seconds later.

"Welcome home," his mother said, a warm smile on her face. She held her arms open. "How was the trip?"

Instead of answering, Dream dropped himself in her arms and shut his eyes.

By the way his mother's hold on him tightened, he figured that was answer enough.

A week passed before Dream finally mustered up the courage to walk into his bedroom.

He cursed his stiff back from sleeping on the couch and pushed the door open before he could change his mind.

His belongings were just as he had left it: stray articles of clothing strewn about the floor from the

packing craze, his bed only barely made, and most strikingly, two chairs at one computer.

Dream reached out to touch the chair he knew didn't belong to him but recoiled just before he could.

It was comforting, having it there. He didn't want to ruin any sign of George's presence.

Dream climbed into his bed and pulled the blankets over him as if he could hide from the world for very long. He had spent the past week doing just that, after all.

It didn't matter what the world thought of him. He was so, so tired.

Dream shut his eyes and waited for a reprieve from life.

He woke up, refilled Patches's food and water bowls, answered a call from his family, texted Sapnap, answered more texts, went to sleep, woke up again, refilled Patches's food and water bowls again, played with her for as long as he could bear, and went back to sleep. Meals were intermittent. When he felt particularly awful, he glanced up at the pictures framed around the apartment and remembered.

He didn't have the heart to do much else.

He didn't know how much time had passed before his routine was disrupted by a call.

Dream rubbed his eyes and sat up in bed before grabbing his phone off the table. This wasn't the usual time his family would call him.

It was Bad.

The temptation to deny the call and shut everything out again was strong. There'd be nothing more comforting than hiding under his sheets from the world.

But was that truly comfort? And what if Bad was calling for comfort, too? The last thing he wanted was for anyone to feel like he did.

So despite everything, Dream answered the call and brought his phone up to his ear. "Hello?"

Bad's voice was bright on the other end. "Hey, Dream! Are you busy right now?"

Oh, god. What was Bad about to rope him into?

"Not really," Dream said. He didn't have the heart to lie.

"Okay, well, I was about to hop onto Hypixel, but I thought playing with a friend would be a lot more fun. How up are you for some Skywars?"

Skywars? Those rounds tended to be quick and brainless. That was just about what Dream could handle at the moment.

Dream stretched his back, eyeing Patches's flickering tail from behind the corner of his mattress. "Sure. Let me feed Patches first."

They ended the call after that with a promise to play Skywars in ten minutes. And Dream was left with all the exhaustion in the world weighing down on his shoulders.

He could practically feel the rust eating away at his bones; he hadn't touched Minecraft throughout the entirety of the trip and back. It almost felt wrong playing without George by his side.

But fuck, rent was still coming up soon, and although he could let the groceries in the fridge rot away for himself, Patches needed food. Like it or not, Minecraft was his job now. He wasn't in a position he could keep pushing off his responsibilities. Agreeing to play Skywars with Bad was a good first step.

"What do you think, Patches?" Dream asked.

Patches swished her tail back and forth, apparently two seconds away from catching the cuff of Dream's pants and dragging him to the kitchen herself.

Dream sighed and patted her head before stepping into the kitchen.

The rust began to peel off slowly, but when it did, it peeled off in more layers than before. And with it, Dream felt remnants of his spirit return.

Minecraft was his game. It was where he spent most of his formative years, honing his skill. It was what connected him to all the friends he had met over those years and all the friends he was close to now. There was something special about it he couldn't quite pinpoint, but he had the feeling he would never tire of it for years and years to come.

That explained why the first time he smiled in weeks was after a particularly challenging round of Skywars upon hearing Bad cheer over TeamSpeak.

"We won!" Bad said, his character jumping in the lobby in-game. "Dream, we won!"

His heart was pumping again and he felt breathless, but he smiled anyway. "Yeah, we did. I didn't know you were decent at PVP."

Bad huffed at that. "Why does everyone always say that? I was one of the OGs, you know!"

"Yeah, okay, Grandpa."

"I'm serious!" He groaned when Dream chuckled. "You muffinheads and your memeing."

Dream's light laughter died down. Just before a comfortable silence could befall the two, Bad spoke again.

"Hey, Dream?" Bad called.

“Yeah?”

“I don’t mean to tell you what to do, but I think you should do this more often with everyone else.”

He said that with no hesitation, as if he were saying nothing but a comment on today’s weather. Dream flinched and fell silent. Bad stayed silent, too, apparently not one to back down to silence.

“Why do you say that?” Dream asked.

Bad paused at that before answering, his voice artificially light. “Because we’re worried about you. You already know I had that entire six-month period I can’t remember. But that’s not the only thing we’re looking out for.”

“I know, but…”

“Alyssa shut herself off from everything for a solid month before letting any of us know she was okay. Callahan spent every second of the day texting us, calling us, never letting himself be alone. We don’t even know what happened to Punz because he won’t tell us about it. And Ponk—” Bad cut himself off and paused before letting out a heavy sigh tinged with painful memories. “Ponk lost himself. He was angry and spiteful and… He just wasn’t himself.”

It was hard to believe Bad was describing the same people he had just spent a week with, but nothing in his voice suggested any of it was untrue. His words spoke of years of pain, isolation, anger at the world, and they spoke volumes of the people who came out on the other side of those years to become the people they were today.

Could Dream get that far? How could he when he still felt a void where his heart should’ve been?

“Punz was the reason any of us got anything done, actually. He was the one who got his feelings together the quickest and tried to wrangle us in the right direction. It worked sometimes, it didn’t work other times. All I know is we wouldn’t be where we are without him.”

Bad stopped at that, and a contemplative silence fell over them. The static in Dream’s head was too loud for him to think.

Eventually, Bad spoke again, his voice quieter. “All that is to say, we’re not letting you fall through the cracks, Dream. We’re not gonna push you to recover quicker—we can’t. Your grief is yours. But what I want you to do is… I don’t know. Talk to people. Talk to your family, if you’re still on good terms with them. Call somebody you care about. It doesn’t have to be us, it just has to be someone you love. Can you do that for me?”

Someone he loved. He loved lots of people. That was the issue.

“Yeah,” Dream found himself saying. He swallowed and nodded. “Yeah, I can do that.”

“Thank you. And—” Bad seemed to choke up but recovered quick enough Dream questioned if he even heard it. “We’re here for you, okay? If you need anything—food, money, someone to listen—we’re all here for you.”

And he meant every word of that. Dream could feel it.

“Thank you,” Dream said quietly.

“Anytime.”

When their call ended, Dream sat in silence, leaning against the back of his chair as he stared ahead. There were too many thoughts, things to consider swirling in his head.

But someone he loved.

Dream picked up his phone and let his heart decide. He held the screen up to his ear, waiting.

And finally, someone answered, “Hello?”

“Hey, Sapnap. Can we record a video?”

The recording was less awful than either of them had expected. With enough editing, Dream could pass off the exhaustion in his voice as a byproduct of jet lag. He hadn’t announced his return to his viewers, after all.

“So, that sure was a video,” Sapnap laughed. “Did you get all the footage you needed?”

Dream hummed in agreement, letting his eyes fall shut. Despite having played Minecraft for 12-hour long sessions before, the three-hour manhunt had sapped all the energy out of him. The urge to fall asleep in his chair was strong, but he still owed an explanation to Sapnap.

“I haven’t seen George in a while,” Sapnap said quietly.

Dream willed himself to answer, but his mouth wouldn’t open.

“I’m guessing he’s…”

“He’s gone,” Dream said.

“Oh.”

Sapnap stayed silent after that, not because he didn’t know what to say. Dream could practically feel him walking on eggshells, testing one egg after the other, not quite knowing when one would break.

And to be fair, Dream didn’t know either. But as far as he knew, all those eggs had shattered long ago. There was no use keeping it vague even if admitting it out loud carried more weight than he knew how to handle.

“I’m… here,” Dream said. He squinted, unsure of which thought to pull out from the static. “I’m here.”

“You’re here,” Sapnap affirmed. “And I’m here, too.”

“You’re here.”

“I am.”

They fell silent. Sapnap knew everything he needed to know. There was nothing left to discuss.

“Wanna watch me stream some League?” Sapnap asked.

Dream didn't answer. He pulled a tab open on Twitch and clicked over to Sapnap's channel, knowing Sapnap could hear the faint clicks. Soon, Sanap began streaming.

And everything hurt a little less.

People. People made everything hurt less, and it took too long for Dream to recognize that.

"Hey, Mom?" Dream said into the cold glare of the phone. "Can I stay over for a couple nights?"

His mother met him with a warm, "Of course."

The days stretched on eternally long without George's company.

Dream fidgeted in his seat, rearranging various strings of code in Eclipse.

George had left pieces of them behind so long ago in the most inconspicuous places. Dream had been sure it was a personal project, but now that everything had happened...

Ponk and their other friends were happy to tell Dream what remnants of George's life he hadn't had time to tell Dream: the early childhood he had drunkenly told Ponk one night, all the late nights he had spent with Alyssa, all the blissful, everyday motions in life only Bad had known to cherish.

This was a message, though. George had planned for Dream to see his work, but of course, nothing was easy when it came to George. Dream would have to work for any information he wanted.

That became obvious after two hours of tracking down George's code and rearranging it in an order that made sense.

Dream read through the code, then burst out laughing.

It was half-finished code for a black hole scenario plug-in Dream had made an offhand comment on so long ago. There were no secrets or mysteries to explore; it was simply code for a project. Of course George got the last laugh from even beyond the grave. He had always insisted on helping Dream through his coding issues, and it was so typical of him to tackle the project that seemed the most complex. He had cared in that way so much.

Dream's laughter deteriorated into sobs.

George still cared, even with their severed connection.

Dream could go one minute without George. If he went enough minutes, he went an hour without

George. If he went enough hours, he went a full day without George. And maybe if he went enough days, he could breathe again.

Breathing was easier, though. Talking to his friends and focusing on work carried away the weight on his shoulders just a bit with each passing day. By the time six months passed, he found himself settling back into routine.

Albeit with shaky feet, that was.

Dream wrapped up the leftovers from dinner in aluminum foil, willfully ignoring Patches whining at his feet.

He still cooked too much for one person. Earlier, he could pretend George was still across from him, still there to poke fun at his cooking and eat despite not needing to. He never did realize how intimate mealtimes were until he found himself without his usual partner.

It was a waste of money, too. He already didn't eat much to begin with nowadays, and his upload schedule was nonexistent. He needed to be more careful with where his money went.

It felt weird not having George's favorite snacks and meals in the fridge, though. As if by keeping more food, he didn't have to accept there wouldn't be anyone to eat that food.

Dream opened the fridge and sighed as he set the plate on a shelf.

He'd adjust to living alone again one day.

Not today, not tomorrow, not a week from now, not next year. But one day.

Despite his shoddy upload schedule, he saw his subscriber count climb just as quickly as he had anticipated. Each video netted him more and more subscribers until he found himself staring straight ahead to the one million milestone he had anticipated since the birth of his channel.

By all means, Dream should've been ecstatic—and he was. It was impossible not to be when sitting in a call with everyone he had grown to know and love throughout the past year. The call was a mess of voices trying to talk over each other, people sending each other the link to Dream's subscriber count, everyone shouting out random numbers to throw each other off. Calling it a disaster was an understatement, but that was all right. Dream thrived in chaos, after all.

Someone was missing, though. And Dream knew exactly where that person should've been.

Dream held a hand out to the empty space in the chair beside him.

His heart had worked hard to patch up the hole George had left in it, but life still felt strange without him. Awkward. Like he was the outsider at a party, or perhaps stepped into the wrong meeting room for work. He belonged as much as a duck did in a group of flamingos.

Maybe if he focused hard enough, George would be right next to him again. He'd scream his heart out with the rest of the group, then tell him how proud he was of Dream when they were alone. Dream would laugh it off and tell him he was the reason the channel grew as much as it did, that without his help, Dream didn't think he would've started it in the first place.

Was George watching now? Could he watch at all? Was he as proud of Dream as he wanted him to be? Was he smiling down on him?

There was no way to know. But what he did know was the people around him were happy to scream out their support.

“One mil, let’s go!” Sapnap shouted, followed by mismatched screams and shouts and applause. There was laughter as everyone struggled through the pain from the sudden volume.

Dream laughed along.

It was the first time he had laughed in such a long time.

The question didn’t smack him as hard as Dream expected it to.

“‘Who’s George?’” Dream read from his donations page. Sapnap and Bad, both of whom were on his livestream with him, fell silent.

This was the question he had feared since he began livestreaming. Right before his first stream, Punz had guided him through a list of questions Dream could expect and had helped him formulate answers ahead of time. This question had been the first on the list, but no amount of practice could’ve prepared him for the sudden tightness in his throat.

“George is...” Dream paused to swing a sword at an incoming skeleton. Damn cave systems generated too many mobs.

“What if the portal’s a zero-eye?” Sapnap asked.

It was delivered with a practiced nonchalance. Dream was certain only he could detect the forced tone behind it. It was a clear escape from the situation, and Dream knew he should’ve taken it.

But he didn’t. It was time his viewers knew who his inspiration was.

“George is someone very special to me,” Dream said. His hand trembled just the slightest bit, enough to misplace the water over the pool of lava. Somehow, that didn’t matter. “He’s my biggest inspiration for making videos. He helped me a lot when I didn’t feel too confident in myself. You guys—You guys would like him. He’s a good guy, the best person I’ve ever met. Um, no offense, Sapnap, Bad.”

Bad made a contemplative sound. “No, I get it. No offense taken.” Then he snickered. “Hey, Sapnap, check Discord.”

Sapnap groaned. “Oh my god, what is it this time?”

“I promise it’s something really good.”

“It is not.”

“What, you don’t trust me?”

“No!”

As the two bickered in the background, Dream slipped back into the speedrun at hand, his shoulders lighter and back straighter.

That was about as much information Dream thought he could've given without turning the stream into its own memorial service. Breathing was easier now than ever before. Even if the viewers would never understand the full extent of who George was, they knew he existed and they knew Dream cared about him more than the world. That was enough for him to rest easy.

But thinking of George now and how much he impacted Dream's life...

He had a duty to fulfill after this stream.

The 404 world was exactly as Dream had last found it, but there wasn't much incentive for him to explore again. Everyone else had already imbued the server with their own memories of George, given the world a little bit more color with every story they shared of him.

It was Dream's turn now.

Time froze as Dream wrote memory after memory into a book and quill. He couldn't quite figure out how to insert images into resource packs yet, but he had no doubts Callahan would guide him through the process if he asked. For now, his written word would have to do.

He hadn't written like this in so long. It felt empowering, almost as if George was next to him again and giving him the strength to write it all down without crumbling apart. The words flowed out of him like everything had happened yesterday. And judging by the smile on his face as he recounted event after event, it might as well have.

But all good things must come to an end. Dream sighed the book and left it in a chest with other books. When he turned, his gaze drifted towards the collection of signs, the last words his friends had left George.

Dream would save everything he wanted to say for later. It was the only thing affirming his belief—knowledge—that they'd see each other again.

All the things he wanted to say to George...

Yeah. He'd talk to him later.

Holy shit. He had gone one full day without thinking of George.

Dream stopped, dropping the hand holding the cat toy to the floor. Patches grabbed the cat toy with her teeth and leapt for her bed, where she knew her possessions were safe.

There was crushing defeat at first. He loved George so much—how could he forget about him so easily? Did he not care as much as he thought he did? Did he become a cold, unfeeling bastard overnight? What happened?

Even after calling Bad in a frantic panic, the conversation they had only lessened the bubbling guilt a bit.

“Of course you’re not a bad person for not thinking about him for a single day,” Bad had laughed. “We may not forget, but we move on. It’s the only thing we can do to protect ourselves from the pain of it all. Otherwise, I’d be sitting here crying all day, feeling nothing. Been there, done that, you know? Trust me, this is good for you.”

It didn’t feel right, even with Bad’s advice. This was technically recovery, yes, but it was at the cost of abandoning George’s memory.

Except... it wasn’t, right? The memory of George’s life wasn’t stored in whatever had been forcing Dream to think about him constantly; it was stored in the bond he knew they had once shared, all the stories Dream played for himself over and over again, all the people they both loved. He felt George’s love when Patches brushed her face against his leg, or when the lunch he cooked for himself somehow exceeded the expectation of his own cooking ability, or when he breezed through coding another plug-in. Those moments were what made his life happy.

He was happy. He could call himself happy again, missing a companion but by no means missing love in his life. And if nothing else, wasn’t that what George had wanted for him all along, both as his guardian angel and his lover?

Dream held his hands out, melting when Patches climbed into his lap and settled in for a nap.

Not actively remembering wasn’t forgetting. He thought he’d ought to remember that every now and then.

The sound of shattering glass was his first indicator that something had gone horribly wrong in his household. The glass wasn’t his main concern after he turned to see what had fallen, though; it was the cracks in his heart splintering back open after he had thought he’d sealed them perfectly.

Glass shards were on the floor now, some in piles and others scattered in places Dream knew would be a bitch to clean up later. The picture frame was jostled a bit; not enough to write the whole thing off as broken but enough that he’d be putting a good amount of time into rearranging all the pieces to fit together. And the picture...

It was a picture of him, George, and Sapnap. They had their arms around each other, and Dream, as the person with the longest arms, had been assigned the cameraman. Dream couldn’t pinpoint when exactly they had taken the picture, but he knew it was from a time less complicated than now.

The picture was shattered. His life was shattered. But unlike the picture, Dream had no chance at piecing the shards back together.

The tears escaped before he knew what was happening. By the time he anchored himself back to reality, he was lying on the floor dangerously close to the glass shards, his chest heaving up and down as he sobbed.

Dream took the picture out of the frame and hugged it close.

It still hurt. God damn it, it still hurt so much.

“That’s not a failure, Dream. Relapse is a part of recovery just like getting up from bed and starting a new day. You feel hurt because you know you loved, just like how you know you love when you smile at George’s memory. That’s normal.”

“... Thanks, Bad.”

“You’re doing just fine. I’m proud of you.”

Ponk [10:54] anniversary’s coming up soon

Ponk [10:54] you in?

Dream [10:57] of course

Two million, three million, four million—

“Five mil, let’s go!” Sappnap screamed, as was tradition at this point.

Dream laughed as everyone else in the call exploded into cheers and applause. It was hard to think through so much noise, but he knew how his heart felt when his hand curled around empty air once more and tears pricked at his eyes.

He could cry, this time out of joy.

It was a relief cooking for two again.

“Dude, how’d you get so good at cooking?” Sappnap said through a mouthful of sliced potatoes. “I thought you lived off takeout like the rest of us.”

Dream rolled his eyes. “That’s not good for you, you know.”

“Yeah, okay, *Mom*. ”

Sappnap rattled on about the type of food he had eaten back at home, but the conversation faded to white noise. Dream stared down at potato wedges, the steak basted to perfection, the roasted

broccoli—having George by his side had forced him into bettering himself in ways he didn't think either of them had anticipated.

That was just the effect George had on people, he supposed. Even long after he had first touched Dream's life.

It took Dream a couple seconds to realize Sapnap had stopped talking.

"I know I can't really replace... you know," Sapnap said, quieter. "And I know it's gonna be tough moving into a new place if this whole roommate thing works out. But I'm here for you, okay? If there's anything you need, you've got a brother in me."

He was right; Dream had Sapnap now. It wasn't quite the same type of love, but it didn't need to be.

Dream chuckled at that. "I know. Thanks, man."

And he did. They both knew.

Sapnap gave him one last kind, sincere smile before kicking him underneath the table.

Bastard. But Dream loved him anyway.

"Who's this guy in these pictures?"

Those words were enough to make Dream's blood run cold. When he turned, he snatched the picture frames out of his sister's hands and set them back on the shelf where they belonged.

His sister frowned and gave him the universal "*what the fuck*" hand gesture.

This was only the second visit his sister had paid to his new apartment with Sapnap, after the first had been marred by struggles with the moving company. His sister hadn't explored much of the space until now. Dream was grateful for the general lack of questions; he didn't know how to explain why he slept in a twin-sized bed instead of the queen-sized he had used before, why there were two chairs set up in a space meant for one, or why there were clearly undersized clothes in the closet.

Dream flinched. His sister didn't deserve that treatment, no matter how fearful he was. "Sorry. Just... don't touch the pictures, okay? I dropped this one in the old apartment, and cleaning up glass isn't fun."

His sister nodded slowly and crossed her arms, tucking her hands in the crooks of her elbows. While it wasn't the full reason, Dream could confidently say he didn't want his sister getting a faceful of broken glass either.

"And to answer your question, you obviously know me and Sapnap. The guy in the middle is George," Dream said. He tried his best to keep his voice level. It was easier than ever before.

His sister blinked. "Oh, that guy. Okay."

They moved on. Dream was okay with that.

Ponk [10:12] 8th anniversary for us, 5th anniversary for you

Ponk [10:12] u still in?

Dream [10:14] of course

“You know,” Punz said at the anniversary years later. “This is the year George would’ve hit his forties.”

There was silence around the dinner table at Ponk’s new house. Bad, who had been in the middle of massaging his shoulder, stopped. Callahan and Alyssa stared down at the table. Ponk cursed underneath his breath. Dream’s gaze darted anywhere but the faces he had known for a decade.

He was right. George still had so many years left in him it was hard to believe it had been cut so short, even now.

Then Alyssa snickered and said, “Fucking old man.”

That wasn’t funny. There was nothing funny about it, but Dream found himself bursting out laughing and everyone else following along.

“Bad, aren’t you older than all of us?” Ponk asked through his laughter.

Bad whined at that, retorting with something along the lines of “I’m not *that* old”.

But even through the laughter, Dream couldn’t help but wonder what his life might’ve looked like if he had met George earlier, if tragedy hadn’t struck. Would they still love each other throughout all these years? Would they regret anything? Dream had been young when they had met, after all. He was young and stupid, and sometimes he still felt like a kid in a man’s body.

What was the point in thinking about these questions, though? This was the way Dream’s life had turned out: successful in his career pursuits, surrounded by loving friends and family. He hadn’t branched out into the dating scene beyond downloading a dating app and leaving it untouched before deleting it off his phone. Nobody could compare to George.

So he was content with the way his life had panned out. He had met George in this lifetime. Perhaps not in the most perfect of circumstances, but they had met nonetheless, and that was enough for him.

Dream picked up his glass and clinked it against the others’ when Callahan raised a toast.

Life was okay, no matter how long he had taken to get to this point.

Death came for him young. That wasn't anything unexpected for someone of his genes and family history, yet Dream found himself blindsided by it anyway.

Everything felt cold despite the hospital blankets on top of him and the fact it was spring in Florida. There was no weight to him anymore. He lifted his limbs freely without any burden. All the ties connecting him to Earth were cut loose now.

Heart disease, he heard the doctors saying to each other. The leading cause of death for men in his age group. Their conversation shifted from cause of death to contacting the family and Sapnap, his emergency contact.

Ah. They wouldn't be too happy with that news, would they?

There were still responsibilities waiting for Dream back home. He had promised to look into an issue with Bad's server, help Sapnap brainstorm video ideas, look into retirement facilities for his parents with his siblings, edit a new video. There were still items on his bucket list that hadn't been crossed off yet, texts from friends that would go unread. All the unfinished programs on his computer would remain incomplete, and nobody would finish them. Nobody would wear his favorite hoodie again. The fanart and letters in his room would remain untouched for the foreseeable future.

He was okay with that. Life wasn't meant to end gift-wrapped with a neat bow on top.

Dream looked around, his gaze landing on his still body in the bed. He felt nothing at it. He had made his peace with death long ago.

But when he looked at the light flooding in through the windows, a figure in a black cloak holding a scythe wasn't the person who greeted him. It was—

Dream's breath hitched. Everything warmed, and he couldn't help but let his gaze soften. "George. You're here."

And George smiled back at him, as angelic as the day they had first met. His eyes were warmer now, speaking volumes of love.

He had loved Dream all this time. He loved him as much as Dream loved him. Was there anything else Dream could've wished for after all this time?

"Took you long enough," George laughed. "How was life?"

Dream breathed out a laugh, too. "Good, good. Was kind of a drag without you, though."

"Isn't everything?"

"You're such an idiot. You haven't changed at all."

"Is that a good thing?"

Dream smiled and stood up, the conversation from the medical staff around him fading away. "I guess I'll find out, right? We have a lot to catch up on."

"I suppose you will." George gestured back towards the window. There was a staircase leading up to the clouds now, and it was his turn to take it. "Are you ready?"

Was he?

Dream cycled through his life, from his early childhood years with his family to the more professional life he led now with his friends. He had regrets, yes. There were moments he looked back on and cringed, wishing he had had the foresight he had now.

There was nothing he'd change about it, though. This was where his life had led, and he wouldn't trade it for the world.

Dream nodded. "Yeah. I'm ready."

So George held a hand out, presenting the final barrier between mortality and the afterlife.

Dream took the hand.

And he was heavenstruck.

Chapter End Notes

and there it is. the end of the longest running continuously updated dnf fic as of 4/9/21. thank you so much, from the people who were in it since the beginning and those who just tagged along yesterday, for reading and supporting me. this chapter took everything out of me but this story means so much to me i couldnt leave it unfinished. this is perhaps the only story that ends with a happy death haha! i hope it was worth the wait!

a note i must make is the first chapter of this was published back in april of 2020. if you sort by date published and go to the very end, this is on the second or third page from the end. this story is very much a product of early dnf before the fandom blew up. i think this is the struggle i had when writing post-august. as we learned more about mcyt and their dynamics shifted, i had to question if i wanted to change their personalities to match the new information or if i wanted to keep the characters as they were in the story. honestly im still not sure which choice i chose, but it was a lot of pressure on myself for no reason. to this day, i struggled with continuity in this because i couldnt bear to read what i had written. that plays into why everything took so long to write after that time period (that and my eyes started sabotaging themselves, but thats besides the point). so please remember these are very much early dnf dynamics and reflects how we as a fandom (or perhaps just me as a person) saw these characters at the time. maybe im wrong though. im always open to discussion!

and thank you for reading. sincerely.

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